

Ambassadors as Informants and Cultural Brokers between Byzantium and the West (8th to 12th Centuries)

Scholars generally consider that diplomacy played a significant role in the longevity of the Byzantine Empire. Associated with military activity, it constituted an undeniable element explaining how and why the empire lasted for a millennium. Official negotiations as well as secret discussions continued until the very end of the state in 1453. The Byzantines called themselves »Romans« (Ῥωμαῖοι) and thought that their various neighbours remained *barbarians* – even the Christian and Western Latin ones. Yet a quick glance at the extant sources shows that this binary opposition is false in most cases. Seen from Constantinople, these *barbarians* were not of equal value; moreover, the *basileis* could adopt the traditional Roman practice of *divide et impera* toward them. It is clear that Byzantine diplomacy remained very active, involving contacts, encounters and common ground with non-Byzantines, be they direct neighbours or not.

In this framework, embassies and ambassadors retain our attention for different reasons. Of course, the people who travelled between courts represented the practical exercise of official diplomacy in their person. Furthermore, there were many official envoys, or ambassadors, between Byzantium and the West during the Middle Byzantine period (from the 8th until the beginning of the 13th century). These envoys also embodied the sovereign they temporarily represented abroad. As such, they deserve a special attention from modern historians. Sometimes, the extant sources also paid attention to these ambassadors. Although there are multiple sources, they are often disappointing because information concerning them remains scarce and scattered. All the Greek and Latin texts that mention ambassadors or even describe the ebb and flow of embassies must be considered. Scholars first have to examine narrative texts: chronicles, Latin *Annales*, narratives of imperial reigns, and so on. Normative sources also provide interesting information – as is well known with two major Greek texts from the mid-10th century, though known

with Latin titles: the *De administrando imperio* and the *De cerimoniis*¹. At the crossroads of normative and narrative texts, official correspondence and letters exchanged between chanceries are also fundamental for this subject. Yet we must keep in mind that all these sources are biased in certain ways; describing official contacts was never neutral nor objective.

Unfortunately, official accounts of diplomatic missions have not survived from the High Middle Ages, with one exception: the account written by Liudprand of Cremona, Otto I's ambassador, sent to Constantinople in 968. His testimony has sparked a great deal of debate among historians and led to numerous publications². Liudprand's text also shows the extent to which ambassadors were informants between the different courts. The information they passed on concerned political or military matters. They also served as cultural brokers, even though tension could arise between sovereigns communicating officially with each other. The present chapter deals with these aspects, from the origins and social profiles of the official envoys between Byzantium and the West to the role they played as informants and cultural brokers³.

Origins and social status of ambassadors between Byzantium and the West

Recent studies have demonstrated that ambassadors were, by their political and social origins, part of the elite. As the sources present them, they all were close to the rulers they represented abroad. In some cases, they were even part of the ruler's family itself. This evidence leads historians to believe that confidence between a sovereign and his or her official representatives was a matter of utmost importance. Such confidence was common, in Byzantium as well as in Western courts, for every sovereign was involved in these relations – be they kings, popes, emperors, etc.

1 These Latin names are modern ones but the original texts from the 10th century were written in Greek and compiled under the supervision of Emperor Constantine VII.

2 See the article by Johannes Koder in this volume.

3 The terms »ambassadors« and »envoys« will be regarded as synonyms in this chapter. If one can find different terms in Greek sources (πρέσβυς, ἀπόστολος,

ἀποκρισιάρχιος, ἄγγελος) and in Latin ones (such as *legatus*, *missus* or *nuncius*) to name them, these terms do not necessarily correspond to different levels of power nor responsibilities associated with their temporal functions. On this question, s. Drocourt, *Diplomatie* 20-23. 201-288. 309-319.

Bishops, archbishops and metropolitans were often ambassadors, according to the Latin and Greek texts referring to diplomatic activity between Byzantium and the Western Christian world. In these two civilisations, all these men were members of the social elite. They first appear in Carolingian chronicles and Latin *annales* from the first centuries under consideration here. Ilesse, Bishop of Amiens, defended Charlemagne's imperial title when he was sent to Constantinople in 802. He would be followed by Haido of Basel, Amalaricus of Trier, Nordbertus of Reggio Emilia, and Halitgarius of Cambrai, representing the same sovereign or his son and successor, Louis the Pious, respectively in 811-812, 813-814, 814-815 and 828-829⁴. They were sometimes accompanied by abbots, such as Petrus and Ansfridus, both abbots of Nonantola in 813-814 and 828-829⁵. As early as 786-788, Abbot Witbold of St. Sergius of Angers, and *capellanus* of the Carolingian king, was sent to Constantinople⁶.

Nevertheless, in the period before 1204, abbots and monks were more rarely found as ambassadors than were bishops, although they were more numerous during the last century in question⁷. After the Carolingian period, bishops and archbishops were also frequently chosen by different courts and sovereigns. Werner of Strasburg (in 1028-1029)⁸, Otto of Novara (1054), Albert of Meisen (1151), Anselm of Havelberg (1136 and 1154), and Christian of Mainz (1170) were chosen by different German emperors, while Aitard, the Archbishop of Nazareth, was sent by King Baldwin III of Jerusalem⁹. Bishops from Byzantium also led official missions to the West, whether on behalf of the emperor or the patriarch: Petrus of Troas was sent to Rome with other Byzantine ambassadors at the very end of 867, while another bishop, Lazarus, met Emperor Arnulf in Regensburg in the name of Leo VI as indicated in the *Annales Fuldenses*¹⁰.

Higher up in the clerical hierarchy, Byzantine metropolitans were also involved in diplomatic exchanges. In a list of ambassadors for the period 860-900, recently drawn up by M. McCormick, metropolitans made up the largest sub-group: 10 out of the 33 Byzantine envoys¹¹. Most of them were sent to one destination: Rome (nine of the ten)¹². It would seem that the ecclesiastical discussions, in the broadest

sense, that they had with Roman authorities largely explains their choice as representatives. Furthermore, they reminded their Western Christian neighbours of the common faith that bound them¹³. They may also have been chosen because metropolitans spent a great deal of time in Constantinople. As such, they were at the heart of Byzantine political power and close to the emperors and to the patriarchs—sometimes even their trusted advisers¹⁴. Among these metropolitans, the most well known is Leo of Synada. Leo served as Basil II's envoy to Rome and to Holy Roman Emperor Otto III between 996 and 998, and he wrote a great deal during his mission. Thanks to his extant correspondence, we learn that he was sent to the pontifical court and then to the Western imperial one, notably to negotiate a matrimonial alliance with Otto III. His writings show that he was a prime witness of what was happening in Rome¹⁵.

Pontifical envoys also served as ambassadors. The important ecclesiastical office of legate was created by the Roman church during the Early Middle Ages¹⁶. At the very beginning of the period under examination, we find papal *apocrisarioi* in Constantinople. They constituted a kind of permanent representative of the popes in the see of this patriarchate¹⁷. This institution did not last, and after the beginning of the 8th century the official envoys from Rome had only temporary missions. At that time, the city of Rome was still considered to be in the empire, but during the 8th century this ceased to be true. A priest could also be chosen as a Roman ambassador, such as a certain Georges who was sent twice at the beginning of the 730s¹⁸. Monks and members of Greek Orthodox monasteries in Rome also took the road to the Bosphorus, such as in 680-681 or, one century later, with Peter, *hegoumenos* (abbot) of St Sabas, the Greek Orthodox monastery on the Aventine. He represented Pope Hadrian I during the ecumenical council of Nicaea, accompanied by another »Peter, the *oikonomos* of his church«, i. e. St Peter. They are presented as »honorable men adorned with every virtue« by a Greek chronicler¹⁹. Abbots or monks from other monasteries in Italy, notably those of Monte Cassino or Grottaferrata, also fulfilled important missions for the Roman See until the beginning of the 12th century²⁰. Before that period, holders of bishoprics

4 Drocourt, *Diplomatie 92-93* and the references. – McCormick, *Origins 852-972: Appendix 4, Register of Mediterranean communications, 700-900* (henceforth »R« followed by the number of the so-called communication) R260. R300. R316. R332. R403. – Nerlich, *Gesandtschaften 265-271*. – Berschin, *Gesandtschaften 163 f.*
5 McCormick, *Origins R316. R403.*
6 McCormick, *Origins R210.*
7 Drocourt, *Diplomatie 96-101*, with the examples.
8 For the date and with the references s. Kresten, *Correctiunculæ 143.*
9 For an overview of the sources mentioning all of them s. Drocourt, *Diplomatie 94-95.*
10 McCormick, *Origins R573. R733*, with complete references; for Lazarus, s. PmbZ #24282.
11 This is the larger sub-group, except for those who were *anonymi* (12), although one *anonymus* is mentioned as a metropolitan. McCormick, *From one Center 70-72.*
12 The tenth was sent to Louis the German at Regensburg (metropolitan Agatho, in 873: McCormick, *Origins R624*); two of the nine had to reach Rome after meeting with Louis II and Agilberga in southern Italy (metropolitans Zacharias

of Chalcedon and Theodore of Laodiceia), but Emperor Basil I recalled them in mid-route: R566 (ca. August-September 867).
13 Sent together with laymen, these members of the Byzantine clergy acted in the shadow of the laymen, as suggests Lounghis, *Ambassades 294*, who considers them as »un élément purement décoratif du point de vue politique«.
14 The fundamental reasons for their choice remain unknown if we read Greek sources; s. the Moulet, *Personnel ecclésiastique 340-341. 343. 349.*
15 Leo of Synada, Ep. 1-11 (Vinson 2-18). – Moulet, *Personnel ecclésiastique 344-347*. – Kolditz, Leo von Synada.
16 See the recent overview and analyses by Rennie, *Papal legations.*
17 Chevailler/Genin, *Apocrisaires.*
18 *Liber Pontificalis I 415-416* (Duchesne). – Mordek, *Rom, Byzanz und die Franken 124-125. 129 n. 34*. – For other examples of priests or archpriests s. Drocourt, *Diplomatie 120.*
19 Theophanis *Chronographia*, AM 6277 (de Boor 460); Theophanes' enthusiastic description is explained by the fact that these two legates approved the anti-iconoclastic views of this council, as this Greek monk and chronicler did.
20 Drocourt, *Diplomatie 118-119*. – Bayer, *Spaltung 120-121*. – Parenti, *Grottaferrata 148-149. 314. 508.*

in the vicinity of Rome were *legati*, received for diplomatic reasons by the Byzantine emperors. Among them, Donatus of Ostia was sent to Constantinople twice while the question of the patriarchate of Photius and the rivalry between the two Romes about their own objectives of evangelization and Christianization of the Balkans were on the agenda²¹.

It is significant that, of all the other foreign envoys hosted in Byzantium, pontifical legates were considered as important persons²². Indeed in the mid-10th century, the famous Book of Ceremonies (*De ceremoniis* mentioned above) mentions them in the chapter that describes in detail the formulaic greetings between envoys and the *logothetes tou dromou* during the first solemn encounter in the palace. Significantly, they are the only Western ambassadors mentioned in this passage, next to the Bulgarians and eastern Muslims²³. Earlier, at the turn of the 9th and 10th centuries, the so-called *Kletorologion* of Philotheos, the list of precedence of dignitaries of the imperial court, included a space for bishop-envoys from Rome²⁴. In the same period, the new office of cardinal was created; some of the first cardinals were chosen to represent the popes to the Byzantine emperors. From 1000 to 1200, cardinals were particularly numerous, with the most famous being Cardinal Bishop of Silva-Candida Humbertus in 1054. Cardinals were regularly chosen as ambassadors after that date, notably by Pope Alexander III²⁵.

Nevertheless, if clerics were logically sent by popes, they were not the only ones chosen as ambassadors by other sovereigns, such as Western kings or emperors and Byzantine *basileis*. »Civil servants« were also on the road between Byzantium and the West for diplomatic purposes. If we go back to Carolingian emissaries, we find that bishops were frequently sent with laymen and, conversely, that metropolitans and members of the Byzantine clergy acted in the shadow of the laymen²⁶. Civil courtiers from Constantinople were indeed numerous in this role. Moreover, thanks to their rank, these men were also part of the ruling elite that took part in diplomatic activities and encounters. During the 9th and 10th centuries for example, *spatharioi* were among them, as well as *protospatharioi*. Historians consider the latter important since their title conferred membership in the senate. Other important dignitaries also served as envoys, such as *patrikioi* and *magistroi*. At the end of the period, Alexios I's reform

of titles did not, however, change the Byzantine emperors' choices: a large number of *sebastoi*, most of whom belonged to the ruling family, were also sent as envoys to various Western courts²⁷.

Beyond their official dignity, some of these Byzantine ambassadors fulfilled significant functions: the *protospatharios* Anastasios sent to Rome in 933 was also an *asekretis*. He acted thus as an imperial secretary working in the official chancery — choosing him as ambassador reveals the importance of writing and written culture in diplomatic relations²⁸. Chancellors and notaries must also be mentioned. While some chancellors are attested by name before the 12th century, their number increases afterwards²⁹. The role of literacy and the importance of written documents (official and private letters, credentials, *scripta commonitoria*, official treaties concluded by *chrysobullae*, etc.) certainly explain the presence of such officers in diplomacy. Even a judge, such as Burgundio of Pisa, served as an envoy, reinforcing the intellectual profile of the Westerners received for diplomatic purposes in Byzantium³⁰.

Yet these envoys, defenders of the peace, could also perform military functions before and/or after their temporary missions. Paschalios of Langobardia, who headed an important embassy to the king of Italy in 943, held the dignity of *protospatharios* and was a *strategos*, i. e. a civil and military governor of a »theme« or territorial and military division of the empire³¹. Of course, the choice of a high ranking dignitary and civil servant was never a disinterested choice for the *basileis*; it was a way to indicate the importance, or not, granted to the sovereign who would be visited by the ambassador in question.

This rationale was also true in the opposite direction, from Western sovereigns to Byzantine emperors: many official envoys from the West also held high-ranking civil functions. Counts and dukes were the most frequent. In 972 for example, Archbishop Gero of Cologne concluded a matrimonial alliance between the two imperial courts *cum ducibus et comitibus*, who unfortunately remained unknown³². Some are better known, such as the counts Manegold of Werden in 1028-1029³³, Baldwin of Mons during the First Crusade in July 1098³⁴, Ramon de Moncada in 1176³⁵ and the Duke of Austria, Henry (II) Jasomirgott who led a mission in 1166 for

21 Liber pontificalis II 165, II 180f. (Duchesne); these two delegations took place in 866-867 and 869-870. – McCormick, *Origins* R559. R592. R594. – PmbZ #21589. – On the geopolitical context: Nerlich, *Gesandtschaften* 199-203. – Herbers, *Konflikt* 61 f. for the second mission.

22 Drocourt, *Travelers, Diplomats* for what follows.

23 De cer. II 47 (Reiske 680-681).

24 Oikonomidès, *Préséance* 162-163 and n. 129; this list expressly mentions two Roman legates, one a bishop named Nicolas, and the other a cardinal named John. Their mission took place in 899, s. McCormick, *Origins* R737, rather than in 907 (Nerlich, *Gesandtschaften* 292).

25 Ohnsorge, *Legaten*. – Bayer, *Spaltung*.

26 Lounghis, *Ambassades* 294, even considers that clerics played only a purely decorative role from a political point of view.

27 See their names, and some who remain *anonymi*, in Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten* no. 1388a. 1398a. 1401. 1413. 1435. 1442. 1477. 1480. 1598. 1639. The

protosebastos Johannes, along with the *protostrator* Alexios, was sent to Baldwin III of Jerusalem in 1159: no. 1429.

28 Théodore Daphnopatès 36-37. – Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten* n° 625. – For other examples of an *asekretis* sent to the West as an official envoy, s. McCormick, *Origins* R538 (Leo 6 in 861-862). – Dölger/Müller/Beihammer, *Regesten* no 547a (in 906).

29 Drocourt, *Diplomatie* 126-131.

30 Classen, *Burgundio* 12-13. 24-29. 76.

31 Nerlich, *Gesandtschaften* 295-296. – s. also PmbZ #26279. – Schreiner, *Kaiserliche Familie* 764, no. 5.

32 Nerlich, *Gesandtschaften* 302.

33 In the name of Conrad II: Wolfram, *Gesandtschaft* 163 n. 11; 167-168. – *Kresten, Correctiunculæ* 143-144.

34 Lilie, *Crusader States* 17. 27. 39-40. 42.

35 For the Crown of Aragon: Ciggaar, *Travellers* 304-305.

Frederick Barbarossa – an understandable choice since Henry had married a Komnenian princess³⁶.

Thus we come to the last category of official envoys: those from the maritime republics of Venice, Pisa and Genoa during the second part of the period. Commercial as well as diplomatic exchanges were frequent between these cities and Constantinople. Consuls of these cities assumed the role of official representatives to the *basileis*. In 1168, Pisa sent the judge Burgundio as well as the consul Alberto Bulsi³⁷, while six years earlier, two other consuls, Cocco Griffi and Ranieri Bottaci, were received by Emperor Manuel I³⁸. For Venice, the tradition of the doge's son staying in the Byzantine court was still in evidence at the end of the period. In 1184, for instance, Pietro Ziani, son of Doge Domenico Ziani, was received in Constantinople with two other members of high-ranking Venetian families, Domenico Sanudo and Enrico Dandolo³⁹. Moreover, it is not surprising to find merchants in these official functions. Although they were certainly members of the retinue following the respected ambassadors, they did not have leading roles. Only a few exceptions stand out, such as Liutefred, a »rich merchant of Mainz« as Liudprand of Cremona describes him, who acted as an ambassador for King Otto I in 949⁴⁰. In the 12th century, at least one Genoese merchant, Baldovino Guercio, was involved in the Byzantine-Genoese exchanges of that period, acting as an envoy for his city but also defending Byzantine interests in the West⁴¹. His case is interesting in this perspective, although he was not the only man of Latin origin who could act as official intermediary in the name of a *basileus*. Other cases are known during the reign of Manuel I Komnenos⁴², or at the very end of the period when a certain Benenato, Prior of the Pisan churches in Constantinople, served twice as an ambassador for the Byzantines to Pope Innocent III and to the town of Pisa. This clearly shows how the *basileis* made pragmatic choices depending on geopolitical circumstances and adapted to their diplomatic correspondents.

Envoys as Informants

From this brief overview, it is clear that ambassadors were part of the elite and close to the sovereigns they represented abroad. Moreover, the sources indicate that there was a great amount of travel by envoys between the Byzantine Empire and the Western courts. Recent studies have insisted on this point. A comparison of official emissaries with other travellers

during the High Middle Ages shows that the former travelled the most. In an exhaustive survey of the period 700-900, Michael McCormick has demonstrated that 43 % of the 410 journeys attested during this period were indeed undertaken by ambassadors⁴³. Daniel Nerlich identified 75 diplomatic exchanges between sovereigns (including the popes) and Byzantium in both directions from 860 to 1002, while Telemachos Lounghis has studied no less than 79 missions sent from Constantinople to various Western diplomatic partners from 860 to 1095⁴⁴. One can agree with Karl J. Leyser that diplomacy was certainly the main channel of communication between Byzantium and the Western Latin world, at least until the 10th century⁴⁵.

In addition to the movements of embassies and ambassadors, it is also important to note that ambassadors served as informants and major actors in the transfer of political information between Byzantium and the West. »Political information« must here be understood in the broad sense, to include knowledge of the other court's administration or practices of government as well as military matters. This passing on of information reminds us that the line between spy and envoy was a thin one. In a Byzantine text dating from the heart of the Middle Byzantine period – an anonymous treaty on strategy – it is significant that the chapter concerning envoys follows the one devoted to spies⁴⁶. While the latter chapter clearly explains that information could be gathered by spies in different meeting places, notably public markets⁴⁷, the delegation led by ambassadors could also fulfil this task. The anonymous Greek author of this text notes that envoys' »attendants [...] should be kept under surveillance to keep them from obtaining any information by asking questions of our people«. Furthermore, the author introduces a distinction between the envoys coming from a distant country or from a country »located next to ours but [...] much weaker« – to whom »we may show [...] anything we like in our country« – and the envoys coming from countries »greatly superior to us. In this case, we should not draw their attention to our wealth or the beauty of our women, but point out the number of our men, the polish of our weapons, and the height of our walls«⁴⁸. This kind of recommendation explicitly reveals the role of these men – ambassadors and members of their retinue – in gathering political and, notably, military information, as well as the means to avoid it. However, it remains clear that these men were not the only ones in the Byzantine Empire who acted as informants. Other travellers could have fulfilled this role. One may think, for example, of clerics who had to

36 Rhoby, Byzanz und Österreich 591. 603-607.

37 Lilie, Handel 480.

38 Lilie, Handel 458. – For some Genoese cases, s. Drocourt, Diplomatie 130.

39 Lilie, Handel 549. – Brand, Byzantium 196f.

40 Liudprand, Antapodosis VI 4 (Chiesa 146). – PmbZ #24749 (Liutfrid).

41 See the references in Dölger/Wirth, Regesten no. 1527b. 1549d. 1549e. – Brand, Byzantium 23. 208-209. 212. – Magdalino, Manuel I 222.

42 Magdalino, Manuel I 222.

43 McCormick, Origins 434.

44 Nerlich, Gesandtschaften 248-305. – Lounghis, Ambassades 474-481. – Both studies include the official contacts between the patriarch of Constantinople and that of Rome. Nevertheless, thanks to the state of our documentation, it also appears that official exchanges through embassies were unequal depending on the direction these embassies were sent: Drocourt, Travelers, Diplomats.

45 Leyser, Tenth Century 46. – Signes Codoñer, Viajeros 43. – For the end of the period, s. Drocourt, Diplomatie.

46 Rance, Syrianus Magister.

47 Περὶ Στρατηγίας ch. 42 (Dennis 122-123).

48 Περὶ Στρατηγίας ch. 43 (Dennis 124-125).

participate to different synods or councils in Constantinople or nearby. We may add the case of various metropolitans and archbishops who took part at the *synodos endemusa*. This one took place in Constantinople and thus these Byzantine clerics could have acted as informants to the emperor and the patriarch. Coming from distant territories, as seen from the capital, or from frontier zones sometimes concerned with military disturbances, their knowledge of recent events in these zones certainly played an important role in imperial political and military choices.

Nevertheless, the evidence for this gathering and passing on of information by official envoys is not always clear in the sources. When an unusual or remarkable event occurred during an embassy, it may have then been noted in reliable accounts. For instance, at the beginning of 867, three papal envoys were poorly welcomed by Byzantine authorities at the border between Bulgaria and the empire. The frontier guard »branded them with countless wrongs«, injured the horses on which they were mounted, forcing them to stay there »for 40 days«, before they »returned perforce to Rome, to report these things«⁴⁹. Thus, this unusual treatment is described in the *Liber pontificalis* and is known to us. It was judged sufficiently important to be reported in a letter from Pope Nicholas I to Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims, in Charles the Bald's kingdom⁵⁰. Yet it is rare to find such information in Greek narrative sources. As such, the testimony of the famous Greek chronicler Theophanes at the beginning of the 9th century is interesting. When he describes how the patrician and *logothete* Nikephoros rebelled against Irene (who ruled the empire between 797 and 802) and how the usurper finally became emperor, he specifies that all these events took place »while the ambassadors of Karoulos [Charlemagne] were still in the City and observed what was happening«⁵¹.

From the beginning to the end of the period under discussion, military information was certainly one of the most important subjects dealt with during official encounters and negotiations. War and peace often overlapped, and ambassadors were at the crossroads of these two concepts and situations. At the end of the 9th century, there is an example of this in the *Gesta Karoli Magni imperatoris* by a Carolingian chronicler, Notker the Stammerer. He describes how some messengers that Charlemagne had sent a century earlier to Constantinople were received by the Byzantine emperor: »The latter asked the envoys if the kingdom of his son Charles was at peace, or if it was being invaded by neighbouring peoples. The leader of the envoys (*primus missorum*) replied that peace reigned everywhere, except for the fact that a certain

race called the Saxons was disturbing the lands of the Franks by frequent raids.«⁵²

Notker not only points out a direct conversation between the *basileus* and one of the official envoys, which is not a surprise, but also that it remains the best way to communicate political or military information.

Official letters carried by delegations played the same role. Nevertheless, the letters that have come down to us do not provide a great deal of information, which is understandable. They give scant details, as the fear of divulging important information to an undesirable reader was certainly more important than the need to provide that information. For this reason, it is common to find letters specifying that the envoy carrying it will inform the prince »by word of mouth« (*viva voce* in Latin letters, or *διὰ λόγων* in the Greek ones)⁵³. The correspondence of Leo of Synada, a Byzantine envoy sent to Rome between 996 and 998, delivers some information on the local situation there, but in his letters, Leo frequently limits his information and tells his correspondent that they will learn more from the mouth of the bearer of the letter⁵⁴. Another famous example should be mentioned. At the end of 1176, an official letter sent from Manuel I Komnenos to England's Plantagenet King Henry II provided the latter with precise details about recent military events in the eastern parts of the Byzantine Empire. Indeed, this year is famous because the Byzantine army was defeated by the Seljuk Turks in Myriokephalon. If Manuel's ambassadors passed on some information orally to the Western king, the letter the *basileus* sent also gave much information on various aspects of the battle. This exchange of information can be explained by the policy of friendship between Byzantium and England, at a time when the German alliance was considered moribund by these two former states⁵⁵. A Latin chronicler, Roger of Howden, preserved and cited this letter, thereby offering »one of our chief sources for our knowledge of this very significant battle which marked the definitive loss of Asia Minor to the Byzantine Empire«⁵⁶. Nevertheless, one must keep in mind that this letter also presented the Byzantine version of this military event. As such, the intention of this letter seems to have been another one: the official point of view may qualify the possible critical reports made by some *principes* of King Henry II who took part in the battle. Indeed, the end of the Manuel's letter mentions the »chief men of your [Henry II] nobility« who were present and witnessed this important victory of the Turks.

With this last example, we can easily deduce the role played by envoys in spying on their diplomatic partners. One

49 *Liber Pontificalis* II 165 (Duchesne). – *Liber Pontificalis*, transl. Davis 242-243. – Kislinger, *Eildiplomatie* 24-27.

50 Nicolai I papae Epistolae Ep. 90 (Perels/Dümmler 510).

51 Theophanes Confessor 657 (Mango).

52 Notker Balbulus II 5 (Haefele 53). – Notker the Stammerer 138.

53 On this datum: Drocourt, *Diplomatie* 293-300.

54 Leo of Synada, Ep. no 2. 7-9. 11 (Pollard Vinson 4. 10. 12. 16). – S. the remarks of Koder, *Sicht des Anderen* 117-118.

55 Kresten, *Myriokephalon* 65-110. – Vasiliev, *Henry Plantagenet* 233-244. – Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten* no. 1524.

56 As stated by Loungis, *Byzantine Diplomacy* 32-33. – For the other accounts of this battle in Western sources (Ralph of Diceto and the *Descriptio Kambriae*) s. Drocourt, *Ambassadors* 101, n. 49. – Ciggaar, *Travellers* 152-153.

question was frequently on the agenda: to learn whether the state that received them was at war or was preparing one. The words of Notker the Stammerer mentioned above give an example of this, even though the authenticity of his testimony may be questionable. Nevertheless, a direct witness and envoy like Liudprand of Cremona shows that envoys informed on military matters with his second mission in Constantinople in 968; he observed the naval force sent against the Arabs from the place in the capital where he was condemned to stay⁵⁷. More than twenty years earlier, his stepfather had also been in Constantinople for diplomatic reasons. As Liudprand recounts in his *Antapodosis*, he witnessed a Russian attack against the Bosphorus in June 941. His precise tale undoubtedly comes from his stepfather, acting as an envoy of King Hugh of Provence, and this account remains a major source of knowledge about this episode⁵⁸. It should be mentioned that, certainly in order to make a lasting impression, the defeated Russians were ostensibly »beheaded in the presence of the messenger of King Hugh«, i. e. Liudprand's stepfather.

Envoys, be they Latins or not, were not only informants for matters concerning military affairs; some were also witnesses to domestic changes in the heart of the empire. Many episodes of diplomatic contacts between Byzantium and its Western neighbours involved the sending of official letters carried by messengers or ambassadors to inform foreign sovereigns of domestic affairs: the accession of new emperors, the birth of children »in the purple«, or imperial marriages. This practice is not attested for each emperor or each of these events for the Middle Byzantine period, but it is much more common in earlier centuries⁵⁹. One Byzantine official letter giving precise information on the internal affairs of the empire in the 9th century is famous. It was sent by Michael II, at the beginning of his reign, to the Carolingian emperor Louis the Pious concerning the rebellion of Thomas the Slav. It explains in detail that Thomas the Slav, desirous of seizing power in Byzantium, revolted against the *basileus* in the eastern parts of the empire in about 821-824. Of course, the letter gives an imperial version of these events, as the Byzantine envoys received by the Carolingian emperor certainly did, but historians have compared this document with others, notably chronicles⁶⁰.

About ten years earlier, a papal letter addressed to Charlemagne on November 11, 813 furnishes interesting details on the political troubles on the Bosphorus. Among the great deal of information in this letter concerning the diplomatic relations between the Byzantines, the pope, the Aghlabids (or Idrisids) in North Africa, and less directly the Franks, the papal

letter furnishes information about events that took place a few months previously in Constantinople. The pope wrote to the Carolingian emperor that the Byzantine *strategos* in Sicily informed the *missus* he sent to him that the Byzantine *basileus* Michael I had lost his throne. Furthermore, the latter became a monk, and had his sons do likewise, and his wife became a nun⁶¹. This refers to the events of the summer of 813, when the Byzantine army was defeated by the Bulgars and, indeed, Emperor Michael I was replaced by Leo V. This letter is remarkable because in 814 Byzantine ambassadors also reached the Carolingian court. The account they delivered of the previous events can be deduced from what appears on the subject in the Latin *Annales regni Francorum* (reporting on the year 813). From comparing these sources, and following the work of Jean-Marie Sansterre, it is clear that the latter account was based on an official version delivered by the Byzantine ambassadors, rather than a description of what really happened. Reading it carefully, we note that the envoys' version intentionally omits to describe the long siege by the Bulgarian Khan Krum and the destruction caused by his army around Constantinople and in Thrace⁶².

Exaggeration, partiality and false information could be passed on, even when ambassadors were numerous or when exchanges of embassies increased between Eastern and Western Christendom. A second letter from Pope Leon III to Charlemagne at the end of November 813 demonstrates this. Based on information given to the pope by a »Greek traveller«, this letter details the confusion in Constantinople at the very beginning of the reign of Emperor Leo V: a pretender is said to have killed the patriarch as well as Leo's wife and son. But what is significant is that, in the same letter, the pope adds that an envoy of the Byzantine *strategos* of Sicily had explained to him that most of this story was false, and that only a granddaughter of Leo V was put to death because of political events. However, the rest of the story was not invalidated: the siege of Constantinople by Leo and his army to retake the capital, the slaughter of the inhabitants when this army entered and the struggle between the pretender and the emperor in the Hippodrome where the latter was, finally, triumphant⁶³. None of these events are known from any Greek sources from this period.

In a few cases, the role and influence of ambassadors as informants can be precisely established. Liudprand of Cremona provides the best examples. As already mentioned, his stepfather gave him important information on military matters in 941. Other troubles around the Byzantine throne in 944 and 945 are described by Liudprand and may have come

57 Liudprand, *Legatio* ch. 31 (Chiesa 200-201). – Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti 200. – On the image of military activities in Byzantium given by Liudprand s. Koder, *Sicht des Anderen* 121.

58 Liudprand, *Antapodosis* V 14-15 (Chiesa 130-132). – Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti 180-181. – Hiestand, *Byzanz und das Regnum Italicum* 181 f.

59 On this question, s. the remarks of Shepard, *Past and Future* 178. – Chrysos, *Byzantine Diplomacy* 32.

60 See now Sode, *Brief* 141-158, with subsequent bibliography. – Gastgeber, *Kaiserliche Schreiben* 92.

61 Leonis III papae epistolae Ep. 7 (Hampe 97-99): *Dixit Gregorius patricius ad missum nostrum quod Michel imperator monachus effectus est cum uxore et filiis suis*. – Sénac, *Charlemagne et Mahomet* 172-173. 291-293. – McCormick, *Origins* R322, R324 and R326.

62 Sansterre, *Informations* 378-380.

63 Leonis III papae epistolae Ep. 8 (Hampe 99-100). – Sansterre, *Informations* 375-378. – Drocourt, *Ambassadors* 108.

from Bishop Sigefred of Parma. The latter acted as a messenger (*nuntius*) for King Hugh of Provence. Sigefred had to celebrate the marriage of Hugh's daughter Bertha with Romanos, the son of Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus⁶⁴. In addition to the palace coup, the information given by Liudprand is very precise, such as the way he describes different parts of the Great Palace of Constantinople like the *Zucanistrum*⁶⁵, or when he explains that Sigefred »assembled the nations of his language« present in Constantinople, namely »the Amalfitans, Romans [and] Gaetans«, to support Constantine Porphyrogenitus. This passage is considered as important to understanding the presence of the Latins within the capital of the Byzantine Empire at that time⁶⁶. Furthermore, Liudprand himself may have passed on political information to Byzantine authorities. He may be one of those who transmitted internal and genealogical data on the kingdom of Italy to the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus during his first mission in 949-950. This period is precisely the one in which the emperor wrote the chapter on northern Italian domestic affairs in his *De administrando imperio*⁶⁷.

While the number of envoys increased between Byzantium and the West during the two last centuries under consideration, the knowledge these two groups had of each other also increased. It seems clear that some communities or cities, notably Italian ones, had more connections to Byzantium than others at the same time. The representatives of Venice, Genova or Pisa in Constantinople could have informed more frequently their own city of the political evolution of the Byzantine Empire than other diplomatic partners of the latter, partners who sent less numerous ambassadors to the *basileis* and who were much more dependant on envoys sent by them. The same observation can be noticed for the Latin crusader states whose relations with Constantinople were frequent and regular during the long twelfth century. Nevertheless, this same period is also known as a time of rising tensions, notably due to different perceptions of the crusades and their consequences – which came from the Latin world and not from Byzantium⁶⁸. In addition to the role of envoys as informants, what is important is the fact that usurpations of power and political upheavals in Byzantium were then largely exploited by Westerners. Latin princes nourished the idea of the weakness of Byzantium arising from the supposed disorganization of its political power. Western ambassadors played an important role in these kinds of relations, sometimes to their cost⁶⁹.

Cultural brokers

As we have seen, ambassadors were central in passing on political or military information. This was not only the case because there were many of them, as mentioned above, but also because they were men trusted by their sovereigns. As such, they would certainly be listened to when passing on political and other kinds of information to them⁷⁰. As part of the entourage and, sometimes, the family of these sovereigns, they were usually considered to be trustworthy. Here confidence was a matter of the utmost importance – explaining why some envoys led not only one but two, three or even more missions for the same sovereign⁷¹. As is frequently mentioned, Roman envoys acted as the pope's alter ego⁷², but the same was true for other ambassadors – whether they represented Western or Byzantine sovereigns. Nevertheless, there are some examples of the abuse of power⁷³.

Furthermore, the influence of official envoys between Byzantium and the West can be seen in other ways: these men were not only powerful as informants and in political terms but also as cultural brokers. This becomes clear once we set aside the political and military aspects of their missions. Diplomatic encounters were cultural encounters and this was true not only for the relations between Byzantium and the West⁷⁴. The word »culture« has different meanings but here I use it in the broader sense to refer to an intellectual and a material culture – the latter referring to tangible objects that reflect a different way of life (notably garments or foods). Ambassadors may have played a significant role in exhibiting and transmitting culture.

Nevertheless, the sources contain examples that, at first sight, make it seem that some cultural differences were unbridgeable during official encounters⁷⁵. The best example is given by Liudprand of Cremona during his stay in 968, even though he tends to overemphasize his views and commentaries. He criticized everything offered to him during imperial banquets and, thus, the culinary taste of the »Greeks« which included lots of garlic, onions, and leeks, which he detested⁷⁶. He tried to avoid dishes covered with oil and fish sauce, the famous Roman *garum*. During his first dinner at the Great Palace, he explains it as »foul and repulsive«. This dinner was repellent »in the manner of all drunkards« gatherings⁷⁷. The »wine of the Greeks« was also repulsive. If we believe him, neither he nor the members of his retinue could drink it and, as the very beginning of his *relatio*, he

64 Liudprand, Antapodosis V 20-21 (Chiesa 134-136). – Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti 183-185. – Runciman, Lecapenus 233, n. 1. – Shepard, Marriages 7.

65 Liudprand was certainly the sole early medieval Latin author to refer to the *Zucanistrum*, a kind of stadium only reserved for the imperial court and used to play polo, located south of the Great Palace: Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti 185, n. 40.

66 On this support of Sigefred to Constantine: Hiestand, Byzanz und das Regnum Italicum 197-198.

67 See the hypothesis made by Malamut, Constantin VII 286-287.

68 On that point: Harris, Byzantium and the Crusades

69 For more details: Drocourt, Ambassadors 108-111.

70 Drocourt, Ambassadors 93.

71 Drocourt, Diplomatie 231 f.

72 See now Rennie, Papal Legation.

73 The most significant remains certainly the one involving three pontifical legates in 861: Rennie, Papal Legation 144-148.

74 See the general remarks and precise examples of Borgolte, Experten 945-992. – For the case of relations between Byzantium and Islam, well known thanks to Greek and Arabic sources: Koutrakou, Highlights 85-100.

75 On this general topic: Drocourt, Pont culturel.

76 Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti 251. 258. 263.

77 Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti 245-246.

explains that it was »undrinkable for us because of their [the Byzantines] commingling pitch, pine sap, and plaster in it«⁷⁸. Byzantinists have long studied Liudprand's criticisms⁷⁹. In fact, Liudprand was not the only Western envoy who criticized wine and food in Byzantium in a Latin text; some disagreeable habits of imperial dinners had already been noted in another account against Byzantium based upon the oral report of a Carolingian ambassador one century before Liudprand⁸⁰.

Clothes played the same significant role in that some ambassadors would discover, describe, and sometimes criticize the culture of the other. Of course, some garments, and notably what the Latin texts call *pallium/a*, were important gifts exchanged between Byzantium and Western courts⁸¹. Silken clothes offered as official gifts by the *basileis* were considered to be a mark of diplomatic success by Christian partners, as well as other gifts such as relics and reliquaries. As such, one historian has characterized Byzantine diplomacy as »silken diplomacy«, as this kind of gift was not only given to Latin or Western partners of the Byzantines⁸². A Latin chronicler, Ekkehard of Mainz, describing the arrival of Byzantine envoys in the West at the end of the 11th century, mentioned that they arrived »bringing many great gifts in gold and silver, and vases and silks«⁸³. At about the same time, the Germanic Emperor Henry IV received »one hundred pieces of purple silk« as described by Anna Komnena, when he finalized an official agreement with Alexios I against the Normans⁸⁴. The Latins' testimonies reveal an admiration for these Byzantine textiles and luxurious clothes. If we believe Benzo of Alba, another Latin chronicler, the anti-pope Honorius II (recognized as the official pope by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine X Doukas) received three envoys from Constantinople in Tusculum during the spring of 1062. These three men were all *purpura induti*, i. e. »covered in purple« and with linen of a brilliant whiteness. Nevertheless, these two colours were not the only ones characterizing their appearance: Benzo, an eyewitness, adds that their mantles were green and shining with golden insignia, and their headdresses were scarlet and decorated artistically with pearls from the ocean. The chronicler concluded: no doubt about it, they came from the *basileus'* palace⁸⁵.

This kind of description is explicit. It reminds us the extent to which medieval diplomacy was a world of appearance, and that garments were a part of official as well as cultural representation. Furthermore, purple clothes represented the prestige and power of the Byzantine Empire and the *basileis* through their ambassadors. As such, the opposite was condemned by Constantinople. In 1137, for instance, a Byzantine

envoy sent to Italy openly criticized the pope, as well as his secular and political pretensions. Reminding his hosts that the pope was a bishop first and foremost, the envoy condemned him because he declared war, recruited soldiers and, worst of all, »w[ore] purple«⁸⁶. Thus, for a Byzantine, the pope had clearly gone too far: he not only acted like a temporal sovereign, but also like a Roman or Byzantine emperor.

These kinds of criticisms involving cultural aspects of diplomatic encounters are also evident in the other direction in the Western perceptions of Byzantium. Once again, those by Liudprand of Cremona are famous. Although he was offered a »large cloak« (*pallium*) by Constantine VII at the end of his first stay in Constantinople (949-950), the geopolitical context of his second stay in 968 led him to criticize the outward appearance of the Byzantine courtiers and imperial clothing. During the imperial processions he attended, he mocked the dignitaries »who wore oversized tunics much tattered by age« and who »would have marched much more decorously wearing their everyday clothes.« Nor did Emperor Nikephoros Phokas avoid criticism: his imperial garments were just »cut and made for the physiques of his predecessors«, and so they »rendered [him] uglier«⁸⁷. Already, at the very beginning of his narrative, Liudprand mocked Nikephoros, not only through a long physical description, but also through the »ornamental robe« he wore, an »old one and, by reason of its age and daily use, stinking and faded«⁸⁸. More than just the *basileus*, all the inhabitants of the empire were judged by Liudprand as »effeminate, long-sleeved, tiara wearing, hooded [...] idle people who strut around in purple«⁸⁹. In these cultural criticisms by the famous Western ambassador, one can also find a sort of opposition to the surprising pretention of the Byzantine officials, who asserted to the envoy that »we [i. e. the Byzantines] ought to outclass other nations in dress just as in wealth and wisdom«⁹⁰. Negative Latin views of imperial clothing seen during diplomatic encounters took on a new dimension at the end of the 12th century, when tensions were high between Latins and Byzantines. Greek chronicler Niketas Choniates reveals this when he described the presence of two important ambassadors coming from the German emperor to Alexios III Angelus, at the end of 1196. They were invited during the feast of Christ's Nativity, where the *basileus* appeared »in his imperial robe set with precious stones« and all the dignitaries wearing »their garments with the broad purple stripe and interwoven with gold«. As Choniates explains, the envoys were first astonished by what they saw. Nevertheless he adds that, »to frighten the Greeks«, they said to those in attendance that »the time has now come

78 Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti 239. S. also 247. 263.

79 See notably Koder-Weber, Liudprand. – Zimpel, Bedeutung. – Hoffmann, Diplomatie 175-177.

80 Notker Balbulus II 6 (Haefele 53-55).

81 Schreiner, Geschenke 266

82 Muthesius, Silken Diplomacy.

83 Muthesius, Silken Diplomacy 237, n. 1.

84 Anne Comnène III 10, 4 (Leib/Gautier I 134). – Schreiner, Geschenke no. 31, 278. – Kresten, Auslandschreiben 27. 29-30.

85 Benzo of Alba II 12 (Seyffert 224), with the commentaries on note 147. 225-226. – On the date: Dölger/Wirth, Regesten no. 952 who dates it to 1063. – Spring 1062 is the date proposed by Sansterre, Image 95-96 that I follow here.

86 Chronica monasterii Casinensis chap 115 (Hoffmann 590).

87 Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti (Legatio 9) 244.

88 Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti (Legatio 3) 240.

89 Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti (Legatio 54) 272.

90 Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti (Legatio 54) 272. – Hoffmann, Diplomatie 171-174.

to take off effeminate garments and brooches and to put on iron instead of gold«⁹¹.

While this last scene clearly displays the gap between two different cultures in the Christian world, other official encounters and exchanges of ambassadors demonstrate the extent to which ambassadors were real intellectual and cultural brokers between Byzantium and the West. Indeed, we must read these examples of mutual criticisms with care, even in the framework of diplomatic and, *a priori*, peaceful relations. Describing official contacts, for Greek or Latin authors, was never neutral, and biased views are common in all the sources: the depiction of diplomatic relations was closely linked to the image rulers wanted to portray within those relations. Just as rulers display their power and prestige, whether real or exaggerated, their envoys have to reflect it abroad. One has to demonstrate his superiority, culturally or politically, and ambassadors are the best representatives of that, at least through their ideal portrait in these texts.

Beyond these rhetorical perspectives, envoys first appear as cultural brokers with some gifts they offer their hosts throughout the period. Relics, textiles, silks or precious clothes were not the only gifts offered; the organ given by Constantine V to the Carolingian king in 757 was famous and is well attested in Latin sources⁹². Another organ arrived with another Byzantine delegation during Charlemagne's reign, which triggered a certain enthusiasm among the Franks⁹³. During the 12th century, the role of Abbot Wibald of Stavelot, who travelled twice to Constantinople in the name of the German emperor, is well-known: he brought back two Byzantine reliquaries and enshrined them in an important triptych associating Byzantine and Mosan art⁹⁴.

Other cases suggest the important roles played by other envoys in fields such as architecture and art. The numerous and frequent exchanges of embassies between Byzantium and Charlemagne, for instance, have led some scholars to point out the role of these delegations in the influence of Byzantine models in some Carolingian constructions, notably the palace of Aachen⁹⁵. Two centuries later, the role of mosaics and the influence of Byzantine artists in Italy, once again through the role of envoys – such as Nicolas of Grottaferrata or Desiderius of Monte Cassino – should be noted⁹⁶. The transfer of knowledge also involved immaterial goods such as the liturgy. One of Charlemagne's ambassadors to Byzantium

in 813-814, Amalarius of Metz, Archbishop of Trier and a liturgist active at the Carolingian court, alludes in his liturgical works to contemporary customs seen in Constantinople⁹⁷. Finally, some matrimonial alliances between Byzantium and Western sovereigns fostered cultural exchanges, especially when the groom or the bride moved to the other court with a large retinue. The typical example is the arrival in the West of Theophano, Byzantine wife of Emperor Otto II, with many cultural and intellectual consequences⁹⁸.

Ambassadors also acted as intellectual mediators fostering a better understanding of each other. Not only were they part of the political elite, but they were also intellectuals. Greek sources provide some examples. In the first part of the 10th century, Theodore Daphnopates, writing in the name of the emperor Romanus Lecapenus, clearly states that the two envoys sent by the emperor to Pope John XI in 933 were »men of profound piety and wide scholarship«⁹⁹. There were also distinguished intellectuals coming from the West and staying in Byzantium for diplomatic reasons. At the end of the 9th century, Anastasius Bibliothecarius is certainly the most famous. He was sent to Constantinople in 869-870 to defend Carolingian interests, as well as pontifical ones. Thanks to his knowledge of Greek, he is famous for having translated numerous works from Greek into Latin, texts concerning hagiography, theological works, histories and Church councils. In particular, he translated the official text containing the decision of the council held in Constantinople during his stay – a text he brought back to Rome from the Byzantine Empire¹⁰⁰. He wrote in Latin from Greek materials, such as the *Chronographia tripertita*, notably based on Theophanes the Confessor's *Chronographia*, thereby providing a history of the Byzantine Empire in Latin as well as a text that would be the chief source for information on early Islam in Latin Europe until the beginning of the 12th century¹⁰¹. A few decades later, there was another important envoy from the duke of Naples: a certain Archpresbyter Leo, who translated a Greek manuscript into Latin which would become famous: the *Alexander romance*¹⁰².

The latter two intellectual envoys also illustrate the circulation of books and manuscripts in the framework of Byzantine diplomacy, though their access to Greek books seems to depend more on their personal interest than on their function as envoys or on the imperial decision to grant them these

91 Nik. Chon. 477 (van Dieten). – Nik. Chon., transl. Magoulias 262. – Choniates goes farther when he explains that the envoy sent to Italy by the Byzantine emperor in return »drew derision down upon himself because of the strangeness of his dress«, a dress directly linked to the office he held in Byzantium, which means that he wore a kind of toga – not worn in Italy for centuries, s. Brand, Byzantium 192.

92 Annales regni Francorum a. 757 (Kurze 14). – Other Latin sources and their analyses in: Nerlich, *Gesandtschaften* 166-167. 254. – Loungis, *Kultur* 52-54. – Tinnefeld, *Geschenke* 122. – Bauer, *Geschenke* 140.

93 If one trusts Notker, *Gesta II* 7 (Haefele 58). – Borgolte, *Experten* 965. – Berschin, *Gesandtschaften* 164.

94 Klein, *Kreuz* 208-209 fig. 91. – Klein, *Relics and Reliquaries* 292-293, with the references.

95 See Drocourt, *Diplomatie* 710 with the bibliographical references.

96 Parenti, *Grottaferrata* 215-216. – Ciggaar, *Travellers* 257-259.

97 And to references to the liturgy of Epiphany among other things: Drocourt, *Diplomatie* 714. – McCormick, *Amalarius* 72-73. – Amalarius remained famous for his tale describing his trip to Constantinople: McCormick, *Origins* 138-143 and the references.

98 See, among a large bibliography: Ciggaar, *Travellers* 206-211. 325 (with the references). – Theophano.

99 Théodore Daphnopatès, Ep. 1 (Darrouzès/Westerink 37). – English translation of Koutrakou, *Logos and Pathos* 9, in a study which demonstrates the high intellectual profile of the Byzantine envoys sent abroad.

100 *Gastgeber, Kaiserliche Schreiben* 93-100. – *Gesta octavae synodi*.

101 Neil, *Anastasius* 786-790. – Nerlich, *Gesandtschaften* 106-108. 203. 220. 230. 283. – Herbers, *Konflikt*.

102 *Alexanderroman* 5-8. – Chiesa, *Leo*.

books. But this latter scenario could appear in some cases, even if sources are not always clear on that point. The official gift of precious books is well attested within the relations of Byzantine emperors and their Muslim partners, especially the Abbasids¹⁰³. During the first centuries examined here, this did not involve Western partners as much. In 827, a copy of the complete works of St Dionysius the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysius) was sent with an official embassy from Michael II to Louis the Pious. The work was well received, but remains an exception if we compare it to other objects sent as official gifts to the West by the Byzantines – as already mentioned¹⁰⁴. Yet the last century saw several Western envoys coming back from Constantinople with important manuscripts, which were not only translated into Latin but were also well received. The judge and ambassador Burgundio from Pisa translated several Greek theological texts, but he retains our attention for a text he brought back from his first stay in Byzantium in 1136: Justinian's *Digest*. This translation embodied the revival and interest in Roman law from its Greek origins in the West¹⁰⁵. Burgundio's intellectual profile does not only relate to written aspects of his travels between Pisa and Constantinople; he also attended a theological debate with Greek theologians in various places in that city, along with another Western envoy, Anselm of Havelberg¹⁰⁶. A few decades afterwards, the translation of the liturgical works of John Chrysostom was written by another Pisan, Leo Tuscus, before being delivered to Ramon de Moncada in the 1170s, on behalf of Alfonse II of Aragon¹⁰⁷.

Finally, the archdeacon of Catania and chancellor Henricus Aristippus should not be forgotten. Sent as an emissary of the Norman king of Sicily, in 1158 he brought back a major gift that Manuel I Komnenos offered to his sovereign, a manuscript of Ptolemy's *Almagest*¹⁰⁸. Aristippus is also known for his intense activity translating Greek texts, among them the philosophical texts of Plato. With his transmission of Ptolemy's text, it is remarkable that his translation was done before the one made by the much more famous translator and scholar, Gerard of Cremona. Furthermore, the fact that this kind of geographical and astronomical text was offered by the *basileus* is certainly not insignificant. Beyond the imperial

display of intellectual knowledge in this way, this embodies the official peace ratified at the same time and by the same envoy between the Byzantines and the Normans. This peace was concluded for 30 years and, in fact, was one of the rare moments of mutual understanding between them, as they had most often been enemies since the mid-11th century¹⁰⁹. One also considers now that Aristippus brought back another manuscript, a copy of the *History* by Byzantine chronicler John Scylitzes. Here again, it was a significant gesture by the emperor, when he gave William I of Sicily a document detailing the political and military history of his empire from the 820s to the 1050s¹¹⁰.

Conclusion

Ambassadors and official envoys acting as political agents were numerous between Byzantium and the West from the 8th century to the fateful date of 1204 and onwards. Representing the interests of their sovereigns abroad, they were part of the elite. Usually close to their ruler, they were regarded as trusted servants. More than that, they played a major role in passing on political or military information, which can still be found today in sources historians rely on. If we consider the intellectual and cultural impact of their temporary stays abroad, and if we move beyond the frequent cultural criticisms of each other, it is clear that, generally speaking, ambassadors brought the Byzantine Empire and its Western Christian neighbours closer together. Ambassadors and diplomacy served as a main channel and means of communication between these two groups. Diplomacy fostered cultural exchange, at least when participants were able to overcome cultural differences, which were sometimes portrayed as irreconcilable. Official envoys played significant parts in cultural exchange. Indeed, many of them were men of »wide scholarship«, notably during the last century under consideration – at least for Latin ones – and it is no small paradox to observe their role in bringing Byzantium and the West closer together, in the last decades before the Latin assault on Constantinople in 1203-1204.

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