Ambassadors as Informants and Cultural Brokers between Byzantium and the West (8\textsuperscript{th} to 12\textsuperscript{th} 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 8\textsuperscript{th} until the beginning of the 13\textsuperscript{th} 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 very active, involving contacts, encounters and common ground with non-Byzantines, be they direct neighbours or not.

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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. Jesse, Bishop of Amiens, defended Charlemagne’s imperial title when he was sent to Constantinople in 802. He would be followed by Haido of Basel, Amalarius 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 828-829. They were sometimes accompanied by abbots, such as Petrus and Ansfirdus, both abbots of Nonantola in 813-814 and 828-829. As early as 786-788, Abbot Witold of St. Sergius of Angers, and capellanus of the Carolingian king, was sent to Constantinople.

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 question. After the Carolingian period, bishops and archbishops were also frequently chosen by different courts and sovereigns. Werner of Strasburg (in 1028-1029), Otto of Novara (1054), Albert of Meisen (1151), Anselm of Hamburg (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 Jerusalem. Bishops from Byzantium also led of the Archbishop of Nazareth, was sent by King Baldwin III of Jerusalem. Bishops from Byzantium also led of the Archbishop of Nazareth, was sent by King Baldwin III of Jerusalem. Bishops from Byzantium also led

Metropolitans spent a great deal of time in Constantinople. Their writings show that he was a prime witness of what was happening in Rome.

Pontifical envoys also served as ambassadors. The important ecclesiastical office of legate was created by the Roman church during the Early Middle Ages. At the very beginning of the period under examination, we find papal apocrisiarioi in Constantinople. They constituted a kind of permanent representative of the popes in the see of this patriarchate. 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 730s. Monks and members of Greek Orthodox monasteries in Rome also took the road to the Bosporus, 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 chronicler. 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 century. Before that period, holders of bishoprics

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5 McCormick, Origins R316. R403.
7 Drocourt, Diplomatie 96-101, with the examples.
8 For the date and with the references s. Kreten, Correcticulae 143.
9 For an overview of the sources mentioning all of them s. Drocourt, Diplomatie 94-95.
10 McCormick, Origins R575. R733, with complete references; for Lazarus, s. PembZ 24283.
11 This is the larger sub-group, except for those who were anonyymi (12), although one anonyymus 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 Laudicia), 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.
16 See the recent overview and analyses by Rennie, Papal legations.
17 Chevaller/Gerin, Apocrisiaires.
18 Liber Pontificalis 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 agenda.\(^{21}\)

It is significant that, of all the other foreign envoys hosted in Byzantium, pontifical legates were considered as important persons.\(^{22}\) 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 and ceremonies (*De ceremoniis* 25). Ohnsorge, *Legaten. – Bayer, Spaltung.*

Regularly chosen as ambassadors after that date, notably by the Bishop of Silva-Candida Humbertus in 1054. 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 III.\(^{25}\)

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 metropolitan and members of the Byzantine clergy acted in the shadow of the laymen.\(^{26}\) 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 *protopatharios.* Historians consider the latter important since their title conferred membership in the senate. Other important dignitaries also served as envoys, such as *patrikioi* and *magistrai.* 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 courts.\(^{27}\)

Beyond their official dignity, some of these Byzantine ambassadors fulfilled significant functions: the *protopatharios* 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 relations.\(^{28}\) Chancellors and notaries must also be mentioned. While some chancellors are attested by name before the 12th century, their number increases afterwards.\(^{29}\) 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 Byzantium.\(^{30}\)

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 *protopatharios* and was a *strategos,* i.e. a civil and military governor of a *theme* or territorial and military division of the empire.\(^{31}\) 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 unknown.\(^{32}\) Some are better known, such as the counts Manegold of Werden in 1028-1029,\(^{33}\) Baldwin of Mons during the First Crusade in July 1098,\(^{34}\) Ramon de Moncada in 1176 and the Duke of Austria, Henry (II) Jasmirgott who led a mission in 1166 for diplomacy.
Frederick Barbarossa – an understandable choice since Henry had married a Komnenian princess\textsuperscript{36}.

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 Bulsi\textsuperscript{37}, while six years earlier, two other consuls, Cocco Griffi and Ranieri Bottaci, were received by Emperor Manuel I\textsuperscript{38}. 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 Dandolo\textsuperscript{39}. 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 949\textsuperscript{40}. 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 West\textsuperscript{41}. 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 Komnenos\textsuperscript{42}, 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.

\textbf{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 ambassadors\textsuperscript{43}. Daniel Nerlich identified 75 diplomatic exchanges between sovereigns (including the popes) and Byzantium in both directions from 860 to 1002, while Theologos Loughis has studied no less than 79 missions sent from Constantinople to various Western diplomatic partners from 860 to 1095\textsuperscript{44}. 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 century\textsuperscript{45}.

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 of information – it is significant that the chapter concerning envoys follows the one devoted to spies\textsuperscript{46}. While the latter chapter clearly explains that information could be gathered by spies in different meeting places, notably public markets\textsuperscript{47}, 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«\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{36} Rhoby, Byzanz und Österreich 591. 603-607.
\textsuperscript{37} Lilie, Handel 480.
\textsuperscript{38} Lilie, Handel 458. – For some Genoese cases, s. Drocourt, Diplomatie 130.
\textsuperscript{39} Lilie, Handel 549. – Brand, Byzantium 196f.
\textsuperscript{40} Liudprand, Antapodosis VI 4 (Chiesa 146). – PmbZ #24749 (Liufrido).
\textsuperscript{41} See the references in Dölger/Wirth, Regesten no. 1527b. 1549d. 1549e. – Brand, Byzantium 23. 208-209. 212. – Magdalino, Manuel I 222.
\textsuperscript{42} Magdalino, Manuel I 222.
\textsuperscript{43} McCormick, Origins 434.
\textsuperscript{44} Nerlich, Gesandtschaften 248-305. – Loughis, 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.
\textsuperscript{45} Leyser, Tenth Century 46. – Signes Codrofer, Viajeros 43. – For the end of the period, s. Drocourt, Diplomatie.
\textsuperscript{46} Rance, Syriacus Magister.
\textsuperscript{47} Περὶ Σπαρτηγιας ch. 42 (Dennis 122-123).
\textsuperscript{48} Περὶ Σπαρτηγιας ch. 43 (Dennis 124-125).
participate to different synods or councils in Constantinople or nearby. We may add the case of various metropolitan archbishops who took part at the synodos endemus. 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 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 kingdom.\(^{50}\) 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 England 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 letter.\(^{54}\)

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 states.\(^{55}\) 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 princes 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

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50 Nicolai I papae Epistolae Ep. 90 (Perels/Dümmler 510).
51 Theophanes Confessor 857 (Mango).
53 On this datum: Drocourt, Diplomatie 293-300.
55 Kresten, Myriokephalon 65-110. – Vasiliev, Henry Plantagenet 233-244. – Dölger/Wirth, Regesten no. 1524.
56 As stated by Lounghis, Byzantine Diplomacy 32-33. – For the other accounts of this battle in Western sources (Ralph of Diceto and the Descriptio Kambriae) s. Drocourt, Ambassadors101, 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 stay 57. 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 Bosporus 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 episode 58. 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 centuries 59. 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 chronicles 60.

About ten years earlier, a papal letter addressed to Charlemagne on November 11, 813 furnishes interesting details on the political troubles on the Bosporus. 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 nun 61. 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 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 Thrace 62.

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, triumphant 63. 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

59 On this question, s. the remarks of Sheppard, Past and Future 178. – Chrysos, Byzantine Diplomacy 32.
60 See now Sode, Brief 141-158, with subsequent bibliography. – Gastgeber, Kaiserliche Schreiben 92.
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 Porphyrogenitus. 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 Zucanistrium 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 time.

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.

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 Byzantium.

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 cost.

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 them. 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 sovereign. As is frequently mentioned, Roman envoys acted as the pope’s alter ego, but the same was true for other ambassadors — whether they represented Western or Byzantine sovereigns. Nevertheless, there are some examples of the abuse of power.

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 West, but the same was true for other ambassadors — whether they represented Western or Byzantine sovereigns. Nevertheless, there are some examples of the abuse of power.

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Nevertheless, the sources contain examples that, at first sight, make it seem that some cultural differences were unbridgeable during official encounters. 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 detested. 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’ gatherings. 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
explains that it was «undrinkable for us because of their [the Byzantines] commingling pitch, pine sap, and plaster in it».

Byzantinists have long studied Liudprand's criticisms. 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 Liudprand.

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*, were important gifts exchanged between Byzantium and Western courts. 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 Byzantines. 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». At about the same time, the Germanic Emperor Henry IV received «one hundred pieces of purple silk» as described by Anna Kомнена, when he finalized an official agreement with Alexios I against the Normans.

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 Tuscum 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 headaddresses were scarlet and decorated artistically with pearls from the ocean. The chronicler concluded: no doubt about it, they came from the *basileus*’ palace.

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 pretentions. 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». 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». 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». 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». 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». 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 Alexius 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...»

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78 Liudprand of Cremona, transl. Squatriti 239. 5. also 247. 263.
80 Notker Balbulus II 6 (Haefele 53-55).
81 Scheiner, Geschenke 266
82 Muthesius, Silken Diplomacy.
83 Muthesius, Silken Diplomacy 237, n. 1.
84 Anne Comnène III 10, 4 (Leib / Gautier I 134). – Scheiner, Geschenke no. 31. 278. – Kresten, Ausslandschreiben 27. 29-30.
85 Benzo of Alba II 12 (Seyffert 224), with the commentaries on note 147. 225-226. – On the date: Döger/Wirth, Regesten no. 952 who dates it to 1063. – Spring 1062 is the date proposed by Santerre. Image 95-96 that I follow here.
86 Chronicron monasterii Casinensii 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.
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 sources 92. Another organ arrived with another Byzantine delegation during Charlemagne’s reign, which triggered a certain enthusiasm among the Franks 93. 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 art 94.

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 Aachen 95. 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 noted. 96 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 Constantinople 97. 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 consequences 98.

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 Empire 100. He wrote in Latin from Greek materials, such as the Chronographia trieripetita, 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 century 101. 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 Dieter). – 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.


93 If one trusts Notker, Gesta II 7 (Haefele 58). – Borgolte, Experten 965. – Ber- schin, Gesellschaften 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, Traveillers 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 Theodore Daphnopates, Ep. 1 (Darrouzès/Westerink 37). – English translation of Koutrakou, Logos and Pathos 5, in a study which demonstrates the high intellectual profile of the Byzantine envoys sent abroad.

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


102 Alexanderroman 5-8. – Chesa, 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 Abbasids. 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 mentioned. 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 West.

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 Havelberg. 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 Aragon.

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. 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 century. 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 1050s.

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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