

Introduction

The general aim of this book is to examine the phenomenon of Late Roman diplomacy, its formation and operation as a whole system during the Late Antique period. The Roman imperial diplomacy's traditional sphere of activity was in relations with Iran – first Parthian and later Sassanian. The experience accumulated in this interaction formed the basis and standard of high-level diplomacy. The Late Antiquity brought new realities and protagonists, shifting the balance and roles. Studying the phenomena of the Great Migration period through the prism of the diplomatic structure and practices is one of the keys to understanding how that transformation could happen, how different masses of peoples and cultures – the existing ones and the newcomers from outside Europe – could be integrated into a cooperating system. A process of reciprocal influence was taking place: the Roman/Byzantine Empire and the surrounding barbarians gradually accepted each other's rules, norms and traditions. We can speak about the ›barbarization‹ of the Empire and about the newcomers' imitation of that Empire. When the Roman Empire faced the barbarians of the Great Migration epoch it had to draw up new foreign policy methods. The Late Antiquity was the time for the formation of a very elaborate and accurate, future Byzantine system of diplomacy, based on rules and norms and ceremony. The system proved to be strict but flexible when necessary. It seems important to investigate the making (and the process behind it) of a diplomatic system in the Late Antiquity period which helped a state and society not to collapse in the collision with the new reality but to take a new life, and become involved in the new processes.¹ Diplomacy can be regarded as an aggregate of methods, rules and norms adopted by the sides in their mutual communication that helped either to avoid or correct the consequences of conflicts.

The main subject of the research is the structure of the diplomacy system, how it worked and its semantics and patterns of development. On the other hand, it is not intended to make a serious prosopographical analysis of the ambassadors and key decision-making figures. Aspects of matrimonial diplomacy are left apart, as they deserve a special study mostly within the context of the West. Neither is it the purpose of the current study to concentrate on the course of events and chronology of diplomatic actions, since this is already well reconstructed in the specialist literature. In this book I mean first of all to deal with the patterns of structural relations and communication, concentrating on the issues of negotiations and ambassadorial practices. I do not hazard to intrude into the economic basis and implications of diplomacy, but am more interested in the semantically symbolic language

¹ »*Diplomatie d'abord*«, as formulated by MARIO MAZZA when explaining his will to analyse diplomatic relations and their political and socio-economical prerequisites as a reaction to numerous recent studies of military history and ›frontier archaeology‹ (MAZZA, *Cultura, guerra, diplomazia* 123).

of diplomatic interaction, which seems to have been the most important foundation and expression of Late Antique diplomacy. That is why the work does not aim to analyse the subsidies and various payments released by the Empire in communication with its partners, but instead diplomatic gifts, which were not valued (at least not only or mainly) for their cost, but for their specific symbolic significance.

It is not possible to cover all the spheres of the many-sided phenomenon in this book. Themes of inner imperial diplomacy are mainly left aside in favour of international diplomacy. However, a complex net of connections and treaties with the barbarians and their inclusion within the imperial boundaries does not always make such a distinction significant. International law and the juridical side of the problem of diplomacy are also outside my field of competence and the goals of this work. The scope of the study is to concentrate on the main working mechanisms of the diplomatic machine and the principles behind them, especially on various aspects of international diplomatic communication. The most important form of its realization were embassies which provided a system of negotiation functioning through representatives. It is essential for the present book to explore the organization of the negotiating process, its rules and regulations, the phenomenon of diplomatic mission and ceremonial forms of diplomacy.

Another aspect is the role of diplomatic gifts as a method and language of communication. An investigation of the types of objects donated and the directions for distribution, semantics and status symbolism of these presents is a necessary element in the reconstruction of the diplomatic system as a whole.

It is important to recognize, as noted precisely by F. TINNEFELD, that the complex and increasingly ceremonial system was charged with »refined semiotics – to use a modern expression – which was open to any kind of sophisticated nuances in order to express meaningful variations of the political atmosphere«. Normally, the relations between nuances in ceremonial and political meanings are not expressly emphasized in our sources,² and in general can be applied to different symbolic acts of East Roman/Byzantine diplomacy. The present book is an attempt to decipher and to interpret this system of codes.

The geographical and chronological limits are as follows: it was not intended to investigate all the spheres of diplomacy in Late Antiquity in the vast territory covered by the Roman Empire's diplomatic contacts. My concern is only to show the main characteristic features of the phenomenon. The chronological limits are the middle IV and the late VI centuries, i.e. beginning with Ammianus and finishing with Theophylact as sources. The research refers first of all to the Eastern Roman Empire in its relations with the peoples of the provinces, boundary and neighbouring areas, such as: the Pontic and Caucasian region, Eurasian steppes, Central and West Europe, Near East and North Africa. Diplomacy in the Western part of the Empire is not given specific attention here for various reasons. The Late Antique West, especially from the V century AD, was developing its own way, within a different paradigm from the Eastern, future Byzantine Empire. The system of Western political communication is a separate, vast field of research, which was recently undertaken by A.

² TINNEFELD, *Ceremonies* 213.

GILLETT and by A. BECKER.³ The time frames limiting the study to the IV–VI centuries AD seem logical as they allow us to look at the phenomenon within the historical epoch that can be regarded as a last stage of the Roman Antique world and also the time when a new one was born. A combination of general historical reasons (the IV century as the significant stage in the evolution of the Roman state and the formation of a system of domination; the VI century which marks the highest peak in the development of the Late Roman Empire, on the eve of the changes of the VII century), as well as the nature of the sources, make this period optimal for examining the phenomenon and system of late Roman diplomacy.

My book is based on the written sources of Greek-Roman historiography. Mainly the works of Late Antique secular historians are used, the most important among them being: Ammianus Marcellinus, Procopius of Caesarea, Agathias of Myrina and Theophylact Simocatta. Most of my sources belong to the so-called classicizing direction.⁴ This group also includes historical compositions which have only survived in fragments, conserved in the conspectus by Photius, like Olympiodorus of Thebes for example,⁵ and especially in Constantine's *De legationibus* excerpts. Compiled following the order of emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos (945–959), this was a sort of moralistic ›encyclopaedia‹,⁶ perhaps it is better to say, ›bibliotheca‹, ›a library‹ or a ›collection‹,⁷ a sort of reference book that could also be used with educational purposes.⁸ Of special interest for this study is one of its 53 sections – the one ›on embassies‹. Its two parts, *Excerpta de legationibus Romanorum* and *Excerpta de legationibus gentium* are known to have been edited by an excerptor – a certain

³ GILLETT, *Envoys*. The book of A. BECKER on the fifth-century diplomatic relations (Paris 2013) discusses similar questions to this inquiry but from the western perspective. It appeared while this study was in press, so it was impossible to use it.

⁴ See: FCHLRE.

⁵ According to the evidence of the philosopher Hierocles, Olympiodorus served as ambassador (most likely of the Eastern Empire) to many ›great‹ barbarian peoples who are said to have honoured him greatly (Phot. Bibl. 214). He himself wrote about his participation in the embassy to the Huns (Olymp. 19). The date of this embassy is fixed by GORDON as 412 (GORDON, *Age of Attila* 186); the same date is given by TREADGOLD, *Diplomatic Career* 713. SHUVALOV denies this date, demonstrating that any date between 408 and 411 is possible, but not the year 412 (Olimpiodor Fivanskii [SKRZHINSKAIA/SHUVALOV] 33, 36). On the author in general: W. HAEDICKE, *Olympiodorus* (11; von Theben), in: RE 18, 201–207; FCHLRE 1, 27–47; 2, 152–220]; HUNGER, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur* 281f. with references to bibliography; PLRE-II, 798f., s.v. *Olympiodorus* 1; CAMERON, *Wandering poets* 470–509; BALDWIN, *Olympiodorus* 212–231; MATTHEWS, *Olympiodorus* 81f.; THOMPSON, *Olympiodorus* 43–52; UDAL'TSOVA, *Razvitie* 143–145; TREADGOLD, *Diplomatic Career* 709–733.

⁶ The term, used by K. KRUMBACHER and followers: KRUMBACHER, *Geschichte* (1897) 258; BÜTTNER-WOBST, *Anlage* 88–120; DAIN, *L'encyclopédisme* 64–81; HUNGER, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur* 361–366.

⁷ ODORICO, *Cultura* 5.

⁸ HUNGER, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur* 361; see on the methods of work and about the *Excerpta* in general: SCHREINER, *Historikerhandschrift* 1–29; SEMENOVKER, *Bibliograficheskie* (esp. ch. 4 ›Bibliograficheskie apparat vizantiiskikh entsiklopedii. Enciklopedii i bibliografija‹, 67–73); TOYNBEE, *Constantin Porphyrogenitus* 20; A. KAZHDAN, *Excerpta*, in: ODB 2, 767; WILSON, *Scholars* 140–145; W. DREWS, *Konstantinos VII Porphyrogenetos*, in: RAC 21, 2006, 483–485; LEMERLE, *Byzantine Humanism* 323–332 and note 49 with references to the bibliography (the original French edition: LEMERLE, *Premier humanisme* 280–288); SMIRNOVA, *Evnapii i Zosim* 71, 75.

Theodosius Minor.⁹ The texts by Priscus of Panium,¹⁰ Malchus of Philadelphia¹¹ and Menander Protector¹² referred to us in the *De legationibus* excerpts are of special value for the

⁹ The text survived only in one manuscript in the library of Escorial. This manuscript burnt in a fire in 1671 and is known to us from the copies made by Darmarius or his assistant in the XVI century. On the manuscripts and stemma: LEVINSKAIA, TOKHTAS'EV, Menandr 313–315 (critics against *De legationibus* [DE BOOR] and BLOCKLEY [FCHLRE]), using the published and unpublished works of M. N. KRASHENINNIKOV, O rukopisnom predanii). See also: KRASHENINNIKOV, Novaia rukopis'-I; KRASHENINNIKOV, Novaia rukopis'-II.

¹⁰ The fragment of text by Priscus is of primary importance for the study of diplomacy. He provides valuable data on different embassies and diplomatic actions, as not only did he have a particular interest in the problem and access to the sources (he served under the command of the *magister officiorum*, a figure traditionally involved in diplomatic activity), but he also participated personally in one of the Roman diplomats' most dramatic missions to the court of Attila. According to the presumption of C. ZUCKERMAN, the editors of the *De legationibus* transmitted Priscus's text in a quite exhaustive manner, including full descriptions of the Roman and barbarian embassies (ZUCKERMAN, L'empire 180). Perhaps he worked as a *scriniarius*, enabling him to become acquainted with Maximinus (with whom Priscus later travelled), who at that time was *comes et magister scrinii memoriae*. Maximinus participated in the composition of the *Theodosian Code* in December 435 (W. ENSSLIN, Priscus (35), in: RE 23.1, 1957, 9f.; W. ENSSLIN, Maximinus (17), in: RE Suppl. 5, 1931, 665). This hypothesis by W. ENSSLIN can well explain the fact that later Priscus was an assessor of Maximinus, the head of the famous embassy to the court of Attila described by Priscus in his composition. Later in the autumn of 450 he was in Rome, where Maximinus was sent at that time, perhaps with a letter announcing the enthronement of Marcianus. On November 9, 450 Maximinus received a letter from Pope Leo to carry to Constantinople. Later Priscus accompanied Maximinus who held negotiations with the Arabs at Damascus and then with the Blemmyes and Nobadae in Thebais. Later, after the death of Maximinus, Priscus was the assessor of the Master of Offices, Euphemius. Priscus disapproved the policy of Theodosius II and supported Marcianus. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why he created a positive, but realistic image of Attila. Priscus was not interested in military history, instead showing more interest in the political history and diplomatic relations. Diplomatic orations in his text are made on the basis of real facts, but are considered to have been rhetorically revised by the author. On Priscus see also: FCHLRE 1, 48–70; W. ENSSLIN, Priscus (35), in: RE 23.1, 1957, 9f.; W. ENSSLIN, Maximinus (17) in: RE Suppl. 5, 1931, 665 (I support the identification of PLRE-II Maximinus 10 and 11, and possibly 6, proposed by ENSSLIN against BLOCKLEY's scepticism p. 48, 143 no. 5: the fact that Maximinus 17=11 was the *strategos* in his mission to make peace with the Nubades and Blemmyes after their defeat by the previous governor does not necessarily mean he had to be a soldier by profession); HUNGER, Hochsprachliche profane Literatur 1, 282–284, with references to bibliography; GINDIN/IVANCHIK, Prisk Paniiskii 81–83; ZUCKERMAN, L'empire 159–182; UDAL'TSOVA, Ideino-politicheskaia bor'ba 100–142; DOBLHOFER, Diplomaten 11; MALTESE, A proposito; BALDWIN, Priscus 18.

¹¹ The fragment of the texts by Malchus is important for the current study because of his objectivity and attention to the Empire's ambassadorial problems and relations with the barbarians. Malchus had a strong interest in diplomacy issues. On Malchus see also: FCHLRE 1, 71–85; R. LAQUER, Malchos (2), in: RE 14.1, 1928, 851–857; HUNGER, Hochsprachliche profane Literatur 1, 284–285, with references to the bibliography; BALDWIN, Malchus 91–107.

¹² Menander is a very important source for the present investigation, valuable due to his detail, wisdom, access to the primary sources and accounts about extremely important Roman relational issues with the Persians and the barbarians. Of outstanding significance is his account of negotiations with the Persians which provides the text of the treaty, based on the account by Peter the Patrician, the details about relations with the Avars and descriptions of imperial ambassadors' journeys to the distant Turk territories. He seems, however, to have no personal diplomatic experience, being only a *protector*. On Menander see also: HUNGER, Hochsprachliche profane Literatur 1, 309–312; BALDWIN, Menander 100–125; LEVINSKAIA/TOKHTAS'EV, Menandr 311–313; UDAL'TSOVA, Ideino-politicheskaia bor'ba 243–274; GRECU, Menander 78–84.

studied subject, because they demonstrate a certain unity of style, methods, approaches and traditions, and provide a full picture of the historical process and diplomatic realities and the collisions within it.

In addition to the main sources, chronicles, epistolographical¹³ and hagiographical sources and church histories have been occasionally used. The character of the material provided by these sources seems rather selective and less applicable to the reconstruction of the system of diplomacy than the data provided by historiography. Additional sources mainly of Oriental descent (from the Syrian, Arabic and Persian traditions) are used in translation.

The diplomacy of Late Antiquity, having introduced and elaborated many principles which were later adopted and used by the Byzantine diplomatic system, inherited and developed many principles of the traditional Roman diplomacy and foreign policy of the Republican, Principate and Imperial periods, as well as those of Classical Greece deriving through Hellenistic traditions.¹⁴ The paradigm of Roman-Persian relations as the etalon of the relations of supreme status partners was being formed in the times of the early Empire with the Parthians to then develop in the later epoch. It is evident that from the times of the Principate the emperor started to play a dominant and decisive role in the conduction and formation of the diplomacy, while the senate tended to maintain more formal and consultative positions – such a scheme was partly relevant for Late Antiquity as well. It is important to note that it was the time of the early Principate when the special bureaucratic structures,¹⁵ which later played a significant role in making the diplomacy, were being formed and also applied for diplomatic use. Certainly in the situation of the new epoch and international circumstances, with the growing might of Persia, the great migration processes which brought numerous new partners and enemies into the orbit of the Roman world and changes in the situations within Empire, the Roman state had to develop and improve the diplomatic system, adapting it to the new circumstances. Thus it was the Late Antique period when traditional Roman diplomacy was partly changed, increased and greatly developed, and a new, complex, highly structured, hierarchical system of diplomacy was created, the one which was inherited by the Byzantine Empire.

¹³ Such a source as *Variae* by Cassiodorus is not studied here systematically due to a combination of different reasons. As already noted, the book does not aim to seriously investigate the diplomacy of the Western kingdoms and the post-Roman traditions of the Gothic Italian court. Instead, I mainly intend to concentrate on the ›classical‹ traditional diplomacy of the Eastern Empire, on traditional directions like Persia, first of all, and different barbarians. Furthermore, the text by Cassiodorus requires a special analysis to investigate the problem of the letters' veracity and the correlation between diplomatic realities and influences from literature. A. GILLET has devoted a serious work to the subject of the West's political communication and the *Variae* in particular (GILLET, *Envoys* 172–219).

¹⁴ See e.g.: MOSLEY, *Envoys*; MOSLEY, *Griechenland*; JONES, *Kinship and Diplomacy*; PICCIRILLI, *L'invenzione della diplomazia nella Grecia Antica*; GAZZANO, *Diplomazia*; ORSI, *Trattative*; ANGELI BERTINELLI/PICCIRILLI (eds.), *Linguaggio*; MATTHAEI, *Classification*; ZIEGLER, *Beziehungen*; KEAVENEY, *Treaties*; POHL (ed.), *Kingdoms*; CAMPBELL, *War and Diplomacy*; AFFORTUNATI, *Ambasciatori*; SCARDIGLI (ed.), *Trattati*; JÄGER, *Unverletzlichkeit*.

¹⁵ POTEKIN (ed.), *Istoriia diplomatii*; KOVALEV, *Istoriia Rima*; A. VON PREMIERSTEIN, *Legatus*, in: RE 12.1, 1924, 1138.

Concept of diplomacy in Late Antiquity

Diplomacy as an aggregate of methods, rules and norms which allowed domestic political aims to be fulfilled using alternative means to the military undoubtedly existed and was quite well developed in the Late Antiquity. Though, in spite of its Greek origin, the actual word ›diplomacy‹ only started to be used with this meaning in modern times.¹⁶

It seems important to try to reconstruct the perception of the phenomenon of diplomacy by Late Antique authors, a phenomenon whose very existence in that epoch is obvious for us now.¹⁷

Ancient authors rarely write about what we now call diplomacy as a whole. The majority of the evidence deals with concrete events of foreign policy: concluding treaties, exchange of embassies, etc. It is evident that in Antiquity the main components of what we today call diplomacy were embassies, conferences, meetings, receptions, negotiations, treaties, etc. One could analyse the evidence in the sources to see if there are any traces of the general notion of the phenomenon of diplomacy, guided mostly by the modern paradigm of this concept.¹⁸ First one can mark out ideas about the art of eloquence, oratory and persuasion (Men. Prot. 9.1; 6.1; 19.1).¹⁹ In the sources one can find some terms/notions/words, which, as I understand it, may be related to the perception of what we call diplomacy. It is the ›war – peace‹ contraposition that gives some possibilities to distinguish the notion.²⁰ There are some examples when ancient authors characterize the barbarian chiefs not only as good warriors, but also as good diplomats. The authors used different terms, like *ars*, *consilium*, *providentia* and *πρόνοια* (Jord. Get. 168sq.; 183; 186; Proc. BV 1.4.12). In the context of these characteristics all of them should refer to what we today call ›diplomacy‹, but in the analysed texts they are not united by any common notion/term. Another theme often exploited by Late Antique authors is the contraposition of the ruler's youth, when he is full of strength and leads aggressive policies and wars, with the senior age at which rulers tended to turn to peaceful life, using not instruments of war, but pacific tools instead (Proc. BV 1.4.12; Agath. 5.14; Men. Prot. 5.1sq.; 9.1; 12.5sq.; 15.1; 16.1; 20.2; 26.1; Agath. 5.24.2–25.6). Attitudes towards such a shift may have been different. As noted by E. CHRYSOS, most of the historical sources seem to favour the warlike attitude as synonymous with correct imperial behaviour, while the titles *εἰρηνικός/pacificus* remained in fashion only for a very short period in imperial rhetoric. At the same time E. CHRYSOS notes that less official sources tend to give emperors more merit for the advantages of peace than the imperial propaganda would admit.²¹ It is important, however, that the authors perceive and underline the differ-

¹⁶ A. GILLET emphasized that the information we have on the Late Antiquity is not enough to examine diplomacy itself: GILLET, *Envoys* 1–7.

¹⁷ NECHAEVA, *Predstavleniia o diplomatii* 77–86.

¹⁸ The literature devoted to the problem is not very ample. The following works pay some attention to the theory of diplomacy, but not from the point of view of how the phenomenon was perceived by the ancients themselves: KAZHDAN, *Notion* 3–21; CHRYSOS, *Byzantine diplomacy*, 25–39; OBOLENSKY, *Principles*.

¹⁹ Here and hereafter I quote Menander in the edition: *The history of Menander the Guardsman* [BLOCKLEY].

²⁰ In general about the Roman concept of peace e.g.: DESIDERI, *Varrone* 107–119; KAEGI, *Conceptions* 502f.

²¹ CHRYSOS, *Buy the Peace* 231.

ence in methods and mark a contraposition between aggressive and >diplomatic< ones. Pacific rhetoric which fills the speeches of diplomats, letters of emperors etc. could also give a key to distinguishing the concept of the means which helped to achieve peace, i.e. the various methods of diplomacy (Proc. BP 1.14.1–3; 1.16.1–3; 2.4.14; 2.10.10; 2.21.19–29; Proc. BG 3.21.18–22; Men. Prot. 6.1.50). Notable in this context is the characteristic of Julian provided by Ammianus:²²

He gained a reputation among foreign nations for eminence in bravery, sobriety, and knowledge of military affairs, as well as of increase in all noble qualities; and his fame gradually spread and filled the entire world. Then, since the fear of his coming extended widely over neighbouring and far distant nations, deputations hastened to him more speedily than usual: on one side, the peoples beyond the Tigris and the Armenians begged for peace; on another, the Indian nations as far as the Divi and the Serendivi vied with one another in sending their leading men with gifts ahead of time; on the south, the Moors offered their services to the Roman state; from the north and the desert regions, through which the Phasis flows to the sea, came embassies from the Bosporani and other hitherto unknown peoples, humbly asking that on payment of their annual tribute they might be allowed to live in peace within the bounds of their native lands. Amm. 22.7.9sq.

Here we see both concepts together: the emperor is brave and strong and that is why peoples all over the world seek peace with him, employing diplomacy. In this case receiving various embassies appears very honourable and his role not only as a warrior, but also a diplomat, emphasizes the greatness.

It may be concluded that ancient authors wrote rather often about diplomacy in our modern meaning of the word. In the source texts one can find a division between the comprehension of military and pacific methods of foreign policy. If a certain politician is described as a good diplomat such terms as *ars*, *consilium*, *providentia*, πρόνοια, εὐβουλία, προμήθεια and such characteristics as *ράθυμος*, *μεγαλόφρων*, *μεγαλόδωρος*, *βασιλικός*, *ἥπιος*, *ἀβροδίατος* and *ὑπερηδόμενος τῇ εἰρήνῃ* are used.²³ But when his bellicose mood is emphasized, he is called *ἐμβριθής*, *φοβερός*, *φιλοπόλεμος* or *φερέπονος*. Their definitions are numerous and few of them are used systematically. It seems possible to suppose that in the period of Late Antiquity a general concept which would unite all the forms of foreign policy undertaken by alternative means to the military had not yet been found. Thus one faces a certain paradox – in this epoch diplomacy evidently existed, since it was quite developed and complete, but the term and the notion were lacking, hence the final, definitive perception did not occur.

²² See about this passage: MATTHEWS, *Empire* 106.

²³ See also: DIEHL, *Justinien* 412.