

ESPERIENZA E DIPLOMAZIA. SAPERI, PRATICHE CULTURALI E AZIONE DIPLOMATICA NELL'ETÀ MODERNA (SECC. XV–XVIII) / EXPÉRIENCE ET DIPLOMATIE. SAVOIRS, PRATIQUES CULTURELLES ET ACTION DIPLOMATIQUE À L'ÉPOQUE MODERNE (XV^e–XVIII^e S.), ed. by Stefano Andretta, Lucien Bély, Alexander Koller, and Géraud Poumarède (Rome: Viella, 2020), pp. 480; ISBN: 9788833137032

PIERRE NEVEJANS

École normale supérieure de Lyon
Laboratoire Triangle (UMR 5206)

Expérience et diplomatie studies the diplomatic experience as a cultural evolution within the diplomatic corps throughout the Early modern era. This evolution would be marked by a reinforced diversity of attachments and profiles, which would imply a large panel of personal experiences. It scopes the mental universe of early modern diplomats, their formation, intellectual and cultural background. It connects this background to proper diplomatic action. Diplomats would also build their experience along with their missions. They integrate specific groups, as masonic lodges, intellectual or commercial circles. This evolution would become possible in the context of a growing use of residential practices and a shrinking use of extraordinary envoys.

The book contains nineteen papers – written by fourteen men and six women – which embrace a vast panel of areas and topics. A vast and useful bibliography ends the volume. This review cannot comment each paper. Using some examples, I will discuss the concept at the origin of the volume (experience) and its contribution to the history of Early modern diplomacy and foreign relations.

Firstly, experience is seen as a prerequisite to endorse diplomatic functions. It has been demonstrated many times that diplomats were used to consulting their predecessors' papers before going on a mission. In Venice, newly elected ambassadors were granted access to the State Archives, as Filippo de Vivo's work has shown. Here, Olivier Poncet sheds light upon French attempts to edit such primary documents during the first half of the seventeenth century. The diplomatic experience was transmitted through editions of instructions and letters. It concerned old as much as recent missions. Poncet's paper reminds us how much Italian norms were being copied around Europe, considering that the edition of *relazioni* had already become the norm in Venice. In France, the political power tried to control those editions submitted to further control. Those prerequisites were complexified along the Early modern period. Indravati Félicité fruitfully develops the question of legal issues. She defines the place of juridical formation and qualifications within the diplomatic corps from the second half of the seventeenth century. According

to her, legal issues were taken into account on a daily basis, far from the idea that interpersonal relationships could blow away diplomatic law. If ambassadors indeed lack legal competencies, they were assisted by secretaries, who often appeared to be jurists before being diplomatic agents.

The experience of diplomacy is forged along with the missions. Diplomatic life goes beyond official receptions at court. Many circles and places constituted social and political hubs for the members of diplomatic missions. Thus, masonic lodges were ideal places to introduce oneself to influential diplomats, especially for a young member of diplomatic household and secretaries. Lodges also offered strong interactions between local and foreign politicians. Whether their implication was sincere or faked, diplomats could not afford to be left aside from those interactions. Diplomatic interactions also fitted within the galaxy of courts. The example of court medics drawn by Elisa Andretta and Maria Antonietta Visceglia shows how those men used to move from one court to another by following customary exchanges and sociopolitical mobilities. This mobility was helpful in terms of negotiation or information gathering: medics were informants or political brokers, especially when 'proper' agents could not intervene. Among those brokers, foreign courtiers revealed themselves as valuable interlocutors. Chiara Pelliccia sheds light upon this capacity of non-ambassadors courtiers to fit in diplomatic relations through the case of court singers. They did so through a parallel universe of court experience, the one of proper courtiers, who were there for non-diplomatic reasons (here, musical ones) but who appeared to practice diplomacy as a part-time activity. Their court experience, or more precisely their experience as courtiers, became a diplomatic space, much more unrestricted than the ambassadors' ones. Indeed, ambassadors were constantly submitted to diplomatic protocol. The presence of those musical courtiers is duly noted by ambassadors, who used to rely upon them. It is also interesting to consider, as Alexander Koller does, musicians as potential diplomats: they could easily integrate with cultural circles and benefitted from their access to broader social interactions.

In the Early modern era, diplomatic missions were also the occasion to discover new worlds. Diplomatic missions used to take back with them many artefacts, which provided their owners with vast knowledge and an important role as cultural brokers. As Géraud Poumarède shows, they also host and support scientific expeditions, grant security and supply food. Many members of diplomatic suites enjoyed the experience of travel and widened their capacity to englobe the world and its diversity in the scale of their work. Studying ethnographic experience through French embassies in south-eastern Asia, Lucien Bély reminds us how much diplomats' prism was an elitist one. This social reality distorted their writings, hiding the variety and complexity of foreign countries. On the opposite of their intra-European colleagues, the diplomats sent outside European ground also dealt

with ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. They specialised in describing the land, and the people encountered across their journey, side by side with missionaries.

Many papers in this volume lack considering diplomatic agents' world as a whole community. Official and unofficial agents, household domestics, intellectuals attached to an ambassador or a secretary, all these people know each other. Paola Volpini's work on solitude shows the heavy consequences of isolation from these solidarities and calls for a more accurate study of interactions between agents, whether they be ambassadors, secretaries, domestics or spies. Indeed, their experience is collective; these links between many types of people form a social, political, and cultural world. Carlo Campitelli's paper on Florentine exile's action in sixteenth-century France offers an accurate counter-point to the old debate between official and unofficial international relations. He shows how these exiles weave a proper diplomatic web without owning sovereignty or territory, which does not forbid the king's recognition or the ability to occupy official and undisguised political space. Their diplomatic experience turns out to be very similar to one of the official representatives, especially around the king. Campitelli, though, misses the comparison between this parallel diplomacy and the ducal one, which would remind how republican networks survive to the end of the Republic and how they pursued an old alliance – the French one –, that had been abandoned by the Medici. This paper tends to evoke the experience of diplomats as depending on their horizon of expectation. 'Minor' diplomatic experiences turn out to become major episodes in agents' political life and background. On this matter, the existing documentation (private letters and second-hand documents) distorts the reality of the field, made of intense work and meetings.

The book *Expérience et diplomatie* brings new thoughts on early modern diplomacy through a fertile social and individual scale. Doing so, it confirms the difficulty of summing up early modern diplomatic stakes without simplifying the complexity of foreign relations. This effort of synthesis is still to do. In the end, this volume participates in the stabilisation of a field that will lead to new global regard.

Pierre Nevejans – PhD student in early modern history at the École normale supérieure de Lyon (France), working on Cosimo de' Medici's diplomatic agents sent to France (1537–59). His research interests focus on late Renaissance Italian history, the multitude of diplomatic actors in Early modern times and Italian political thought; e-mail: pierre.nevejans@ens-lyon.fr