Chapter 5: Diplomacy in Medieval Islamic World **12,000**

Out of the many branches of International Law, that concerning diplomacy, especially medieval Islamic diplomacy, is certainly one of the most problematic. This stems first from the use of "diplomacy" as an umbrella term, that includes mostly everything relating to peace-making or relationships between powers, but also from its use to relate to practices that were not always understood by the actors themselves within such a unifying frame. Furthermore, the "law of peace" — under which diplomacy is usually included—, unlike the "law of war", has been less discussed by jurists over time. Only a few points have in fact attracted the attention, such as the conclusion of treaties and the immunity of the messengers, leaving out many — essential — aspects of the diplomatic practice. This makes sense, when we know that most of the common components of what we now know to be "diplomacy" have in fact not been discussed nor commented in the traditional sources of law, that are the Qurʾān and Sunna. The rules of "diplomacy" seems thus a priori to belong more to the realms of the customs (ʿ*urf*), than to the traditional sources of law.

While originally focused on the study of the legal organization of diplomacy in the medieval Islamic world from the time of the Prophet (622) until the conquest of Constantinople (1453), this chapter will highlight the difficulty of doing so in the traditional way; that is based on the traditional sources of law and simplistic understanding of "diplomacy". Indeed, diplomacy, as it developed within Islam, was not strictly speaking a legal issue, but was rather one related to both religion and statecraft, that eventually became an attribute of kingship and a means of communication among the ruling elite. Diplomacy thus encompassed and served many domains, and the sources that have discussed it — in one way or another — were as numerous as diverse, which does not always make the task easy.

After first reviewing the definition of diplomacy and the field of diplomatic study, in a general way, the chapter will focus on the concept and definition of Islamic diplomacy in the medieval context. Doing so, it will first address the common narrative found in Islamic studies concerning the so-called dual division of the world, *dār al-islām/dār al-ḥarb*, and how this frame has influenced our understanding of Islamic diplomacy. The chapter will then turn to the legal aspects of diplomacy strictly speaking and present its treatment in the traditional sources of law. This analysis will show that only limited aspects of the organization of diplomacy were in fact covered by those sources. This observation however does not exclude any treatment of diplomacy within the *siyar*, the so-called *Islamic Law of Nations*. It is indeed recognized that the *siyar*, while sharing all sources with the *sharīʿah*, allows the use of alternative methods and principles, such as the customs (ʿ*urf*), in a greater extent — at least when it comes to diplomatic matters. While not recorded into legal writing, this custom is nevertheless to be found in various sources collection, such as the so-called *Advice literature*, but also more importantly in the administrative literature and historiography, especially the chancery manuals and the chronicles. Based on those sources, the chapter will further discuss diplomacy in medieval Islam, including the role medieval actors gave to diplomatic practices, the rules — official and unspoken — at the basis of the diplomatic exchanges, and the reality surrounding the choice of the ambassador — the key figure of the exchanges. All aspects discussed will be complemented and illustrated with concrete examples of diplomatic relations. Though we will try to show the diplomatic practice throughout the entire period

covered in this volume, the later period — especially that of the reign of the Mamluk Sultanate in Egypt and Syria (r. 1250-1517) — will be taken as point of reference, this not only due to the present author's expertise, but also because this period has produced (and kept) an exceptional material not to be found for previous periods.

DIPLOMACY

Already in 1939, the British diplomat Harold Nicolson noted the ambiguity of the term "diplomacy," stating that "In current language this word "diplomacy" is carelessly taken to denote several quite different things."[1] Interchangeably used to refer to "foreign policy," "negotiation," as well as "negotiation process," "a branch of the Foreign Service," or finally "a skill in the conduct of international negotiation."[2] Other famous definitions have focused on one or the other points, such as Satow's definition of diplomacy as "the application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between the governments of independent states, extending sometimes also to their relations with vassal states,"[3] or the Oxford English Dictionary, that defines it as "the profession, activity, or skill of managing international relations, typically by a country's representatives abroad."[4] Those definitions, mostly attempted by practitioners, very much tend to focus on the means, rather than the nature of diplomacy — this unlike the original definition of the field. Indeed, when the word *diplomatie* first appeared in French in the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* in 1798, it denoted to the "Science of the relationships, of interests between powers,"[5] before it passed on to other European languages and developed into what we know of today: "the customs and rule of public ministries, the forms of negotiation; the corps of ambassadors and envoys,"[6] to eventually include mostly everything linked to the practice of war, peace and alliances.

This latter association has not only emerged as predominant among the practitioners and theorists alike, but also among political historians, who for a long time have equaled political history to diplomatic history. Up to the 19th-early 20th indeed, diplomatic history was predominant in Europe, as a tool to legitimize and justify the nation-states building. It was thus often militant, as well as positivistic, and mostly focused on the history of the relations — in war and in peace — between the big powers.[7] The concerns of the time, such as the justification of the nations, the establishment of frontiers, were also transposed to earlier periods, which became some sort of research laboratories aiming to support the emergence of modernity. Therefore, next to the *histoire évenementielle* of the diplomatic relations between states, some topics became popular and progressively came to characterize the field, at least for the earlier periods. Prime among these are of course the focus on the profession of ambassador, whose profile, career, and function were given increased scholarly attention,

[1] Nicolson, H.G, *Diplomacy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939): 13.
[2] Ibid. : 13.
[3] Satow, E., *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice* (London: Longmans, 1917): 1.
[4] Oxfordreference.com
[5] T. Balzaqc *Et Al.* (Eds.), *Global Diplomacy. An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 12.
[6] *Webster's Dictionary's* 1817 definition, quoted in *Ibid.*: 12.
[7] Péquignot, S., « Les Diplomaties occidentales, XIIIIe-XVe siècle,» *Les Relations diplomatiques au Moyen-Âge. Formes et enjeux. Actes du XLIe Congrès de la SHMEPS (Lyon, 3-6 juin 2010),* (Paris 2011) : 51-52.

as well as the establishment of the permanent or resident embassy, that was recognized as the origin of the modern diplomacy.[8]

After a long period of fame however, *Diplomacy* as field of study has mostly been shunned by historians during the 20th century, who considered it as an old fashioned and antiquarian domain.[9] It has thus been increasingly taken over by jurists or political scientists and included within the more popular field of International Relations study (IR).[10] If some major works were nevertheless produced during that time — especially in Italy and England —,[11] we had to wait the 21st century for diplomatic history to reintegrate the historical field fully, though in a renew and provocative form. Based on and inspired by the new trends developed within other fields, such as Social and Cultural history, or even the social sciences, the discipline has been given a new impulse under the so-called *New Diplomatic History (NDH).*[12]

The achievements of the *NDH* have been particularly fruitful, and especially relevant to the study of premodern diplomacy — be it medieval or early modern. Indeed, while breaking free from the old nationalist bias, the discipline has also taken some distance from the state entity that had previously dominated the study, to focus on a multiplicity of actors and agents, that better fits the premodern reality.[13] Next to the legal organization of diplomacy, attention is also now given to its customary practice, with an increasing interest for the diplomatic culture that underlies the contacts. Diplomacy has left the strict realms of the politics to highlight social practice and dynamics. Culturally too, the spectrum of diplomacy has been greatly expanded to include all type of communication involved, verbal and non-verbal, such as the ceremonial and gifts.[14] Finally, Europe has now lost its monopoly, since other type and practice of diplomacy have been highlighted and recognized, such as those performed by Muslim powers, especially during the Early modern period.[15]

Islamic Diplomacy

When it comes to the study of Islamic diplomacy in the so-called classical age however, it must unfortunately be noted that, it still follows a rather traditional path. The history of medieval Islamic diplomacy, especially the earlier period, is still in fact a history of the treaties (mostly peace treaties) and negotiations among recognized state-entity, or of the legal aspects of diplomacy, only sometimes extending to the envoys and receptions. Few noticeable examples that deal with the cross-cultural diplomacy with the Byzantine Empire (especially in the 10th

[8] Mattingly, G., "The First Resident Embassies: Medieval Origins of Modern Diplomacy," *Speculum* 12/4 (1937): 423-439; Péquignot, S., "Les Diplomaties occidentales, XIIIIe-XVe siècle,": 51-52.
[9] Péquignot, S., « Les Diplomaties occidentales, XIIIIe-XVe siècle,»: 53-54.
[10] See the many companions and introduction to International Relations. One example among many is *An Introduction to International Relations* edited by R. Devetak, A. Burke and J. George (Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[11] See bibliography in Péquignot, S., "Les Diplomaties occidentales, XIIIIe-XVe siècle." and Sowerby, T.A., "Early Modern Diplomatic History," *History Compass* 14/9 (2016): esp. 442-443.
[12] Watkins, J., « Towards a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 38/1 (2008): 1-14.
[13] Péquignot, S., "Les Diplomaties occidentales, XIIIIe-XVe siècle."
[14] See references in Sowerby, T.A., "Early Modern Diplomatic History,": 445-446.
[15] The Ottomans are particularly well represented. See recently, Diplomatic Cultures at the Ottoman Court, c.1500-1630, ed. By T.A. Sowerby and C. Markiewicz (Routledge, 2021).

century),[16] and the Crusaders (end of 11th-13th centuries),[17] go beyond that trend to also include cultural aspects, such as the exchanges of gifts and the ceremonial, or customary practices involved in the conclusion of Christian-Muslim contacts and treaties. The later period, dominated by the reign of the Mamluk Sultanate, the (Turco-) Mongols and the Ottomans (13th-16th centuries), has also more recently proven to be a particularly fertile field of inquiry as far as diplomacy is concerned.[18] This period is in fact quite rich as for the number and diversity of the sources produced — and still extant — that deal with various aspects of diplomacy. Those three groups will be taken as example to illustrate one or the other development of diplomacy to be presented in this chapter.

But for now, I would like to first address the reasons for such a traditional — somehow outdated — approach to the history of diplomacy in medieval Islam. The first major problem is the rather limited understanding of diplomacy. Due to the lack of word *diplomacy* or similar concept in Arabic during the medieval period, scholars have so far too much sought to transpose the modern definition as is, and to unify under that frame many processes that were originally seen as separate by the actors themselves. Doing so, they also excluded other processes and practices, which they judged unfit to that definition. Therefore, diplomacy in medieval Islam has usually been included in the scholarship dealing with the *Law of Peace*, which usually concentrated on the status of foreigners and non-Muslim communities (*dhimmīs*) in Islamic territory, treaty-making, commercial relations, and arbitration.[19] Due to this predominant legal perspective, there has been a great focus on the earlier period and the example of the Prophet and the Rashīdūn caliphs, which established the precedent to follow, as we will see. [20]

In other words, based on those works, diplomacy in the medieval Islamic world appears mostly to be the history of the delegations and treaties that were exchanged between the Prophet and later on the caliphs, and non-Muslim powers, in order to primarily, conclude treaties, pay tribute and ransom prisoners. The earlier delegations sent by the Prophet to call the various foreign rulers to Islam, are also sometimes mentioned, though there are not usually included in the discussion on *Siyar*, or Islamic international law. Diplomacy in medieval Islam thus mostly appears as a means to establish and to preserve peace between Islam on the one hand, and non-Islamic powers on the other. This trend is supported by the so-called Islamic conception of the world, which represents the second bias that has dominated the field.

It has indeed usually been understood that the world according to Islam was divided between the *dār al-Islām* and *dār al-Ḥarb*, which are traditionally translated as the House or Adobe of

[16] See the work of Alexander Beihammer and Anthony Cutler.

[17] Köhler, M., *Alliances abd Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers in the Middle East: Cross-Cultural Diplomacy in the Period of the Crusades* (Brill, 2013).

[18] Broadbridge, A.F*., Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds,* (Cambridge University Press, 2008); Muslu, C.Y., *The Ottoman and the Mamluks: Imperial diplomacy and warfare in the Islamic world*, (London and New York, 2014); F. Bauden, M. Dekkiche (Eds.), *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies. Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics* (Brill, 2019).

[19] See for example Khadduri, M., *War and Peace in the Law of Islam,* (Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2010; first published in 1955).

[20] Romahi, S.A., *Studies in International Law and Diplomatic Practice with Introduction to Islamic Law* (Tokyo, 1980); Khadduri, M., *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*; Ismail, M.-B. A., *Islamic Law and Transnational Diplomatic Law. A Quest for Complementarity in Divergent Legal Theories,* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Istanbuli, Y., *Diplomacy and Diplomatic Practice in the Early Islamic Era* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

Islam/ War. More recently, the term *territory* has been suggested as more fit "to capture the various spatial dimensions inherent in [such] concepts and their implications for questions related to religious authority, identity, and the interpretation of Islamic norms."[21] Though jurists from the various schools of law do not seem to agree on what defines the *dār al-islām*, the *dār al-ḥarb* on the contrary is by most considered as the place "where Muslims did not have political and legal authority, and where they were not able to live in peace and practice their religion;"[22] and thus consequently it represents the lands against which *jihād* was to be waged and where Islam was to be spread. In this perspective, diplomacy is usually instrument *par excellence* that will allow peaceful interaction between the two territories, either as preceding *jihād*, on the model of the Prophet, who sent peaceful delegations to call foreign rulers to accept Islam (persuasion playing here a key role), or as a peaceful alternative to *jihād*, when the coexistence of the two *dārs* was recognized as more permanent,[23] — increasing thus the understanding of diplomacy in the context of war/peace.

In more recent years however, these concepts and conception of the world have been revaluated and questioned, as attested by the publication of two volumes on that theme in 2017 and 2018.[24] While usually presented in modern scholarships as universally accepted concepts, those volumes in fact show how restricted their use were in the practice, since they were limited to the legal sphere only. This, to the point that according to one of the authors, it should be noted that "It is the prism of other ways of thinking which has also led scholars to constrain into a rigid conceptual pattern what appears to have been, for Muslim jurists, first and foremost a categorization of the world devised as a useful instrument in defining rules governing the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims of outside the world, to bring order to an extremely mobile reality, made of continuous exchanges as well as conflicts. In fact, judging from the success of the expression *dār al-islām* among Western scholars, we could almost say that they made it their own because it seems to correspond to their idea of the Muslim world, in the singular."[25]

Though this may not seem directly related to our present topic, I may argue otherwise, since the history of diplomacy in medieval Islam has so far entirely been based on this dichotomy, and every kind of interactions between the Islamic and non-Islamic world have been read accordingly. Furthermore — and this is no less problematic —, in this view, diplomacy seems strictly restricted to contacts and exchanges between the *dār al-islām* and the *dār al-ḥarb.* This assumption of the existence of a single *dār al-islām* has entirely put into oblivion the reality of diplomacy practice within the Islamic world as well, among the various Muslim powers. It must indeed be noted that most of the scholarship dealing with medieval Islamic diplomacy in fact focuses on inter-confessional relations, such as with the Byzantines, the Crusaders, the Mongols, the Italian and Catalan traders, etc. Only recently has there been an

[21] Albrecht, S., *Dār al-Islām Revisited. Territoriality in Contemporary Islamic Legal Discourse on Muslim in the West* (Brill: 2018): 36.
[22] *Ibid.* : 54.
[23] Bsoul, L.A., « Islamic Diplomacy: Views of the Classical Jurists," in M.-L. Frick, A.Th. Müller (Eds), *Islam and International Law. Engaging Self-Centrism from a Plurality of Perspectives* (Brill: 2013): 127-145; Khadduri, M., *The Islamic Law of Nations. Shaybānī's Siyar,* (Johns Hopkins Press, 1966): 17.
[24] G. Calasso, G. Lancioni (Eds.), *Dār al-Islām/dār al-ḥarb. Territories, People, Identities* (Brill, 2017); Albrecht, S., *Dār al-Islām Revisited. Territoriality in Contemporary Islamic Legal Discourse on Muslim in the West* (Brill: 2018).
[25] Calasso, G., "Introduction: Concepts, Words, Historical Realities of a "Classical" Dichotomy," in G. Calasso, G. Lancioni (Eds.), *Dār al-Islām/dār al-ḥarb. Territories, People, Identities* (Brill, 2017): 2-3.

effort to question and revise this bias in the field, this especially for the later medieval period (especially the Mamluk period).[26] Be that as it may, the brief review of the biases of the field just presented, shows that the term *diplomacy* in the medieval Islamic context should first be addressed and defined and its general rules highlighted.

Unsurprisingly, the word *diplomacy* has no equivalent in Arabic during the premodern period, nor does a word exist that refers to this concept in its contemporary meaning. Instead, two words are found, *risālah* and *sifārah,* that respectively designate the mission and the mediation.[27] It must however be noted that they are only rarely found as such, unlike the terms *rasūl* and *safīr* (based on the same roots *r-s-l* and *s-f-r*), that refer to "messenger" and "mediator," and that are most used in the literature. Going back to the meaning of those words in fact highlight the original function attached to Islamic *diplomacy*. *Rasūl* is indeed usually associated to the apostolic mission of spreading the words of God — and thus Islam — ,[28] and *safīr* is strictly used then in relation to conciliatory mission aiming to negotiate truce.[29] While this latter function seems to have been broadly used among the Arabs during the period preceding the rise of Islam,[30] the use of messengers by the Prophet and the early caliphs shows that envoys in Islam were also increasingly — if not predominantly— sent to inform local (Arab) chiefs and foreign rulers of the new religion and to call them to embrace it,[31] especially after the Prophet was recognized as political leader following the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah in 628.[32] As we will see, this treaty will have major repercussions on the practice of treaty-making in Islam and the development of "diplomatic law."

Before turning to the basis of the diplomatic practices and its rules, a last aspect should however be added to complete our definition of diplomacy, that is too often silenced to the detriment of the other two above-mentioned elements. As correctly reminded by Labeeb Bsoul in his 2013 article on Islamic Diplomacy: "Sūrah al-Hujurāt, considered among the leadings chapters, refers to the basis for cooperation, doctrinal acquaintance, and continuous relations with other nations and peoples."[33] In this respect, diplomacy in Islam closely reminds us of the original 18th century definition of diplomacy as the "Science of the relationships, of interests between powers." Indeed, what seems to matter most in the practice of diplomacy was to assure the constant relation and contact among the people and nations, and by extension, diplomacy was extensively used by those to assert their sovereignty and to communicate it. While this practice is quite obvious from the exchanges that took place between the Abbasid caliphate and the Byzantine empire in the 9th-10th century, it was even more speaking when looking at intra-Muslim contacts during a later period, as we will see. Curiously though, this basic aspect of diplomacy, that could be equalled to a means of

[26] Dekkiche, M., « Mamluk Diplomacy : The Present State of Research," F. Bauden, M. Dekkiche (eds.), *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies. Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics*, (Brill, 2019): 105-182.
[27] Ibn Farrāʾ, *Kitāb Rusul al-mulūk,* ed. Ṣ. Al-D. al-Munajjid, (Beirut, 1972; 1st publ. in Cairo, 1947): 21.
[28] *Ibid. :* 23-27.
[29] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshāʾ fī ṣināʿat al-kātib wa'l-kātim,* ed. M.ʿA. al-R. ibrāhīm (Cairo 1913-9) vol. 6 : 15 ; 14 : 103.
[30] Ismail, M.-B. A., *Islamic Law and Transnational Diplomatic Law*: 33.
[31] Ibid.: 34-37.
[32] Ibid. : 33 ; 98-101 ; Bsoul, L.A., « Islamic Diplomacy: Views of the Classical Jurists": 138-140.
[33] Ibid.: 137 : Qurʾān (49:13) : « O humanity ! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allāh is the one who has *taqwā*. Verily, Allāh is All-Knowing, All-Aware."

communication in the broader sense, is the less discussed by scholars — be it now and then —, and for a good reason. Influenced by the modern tendencies and approaches to diplomacy, scholars have mostly focused on its legal aspects and have attempted to highlight some kind of diplomatic law.

DIPLOMATIC LAW IN ISLAM

Diplomatic law corresponds to the whole set of rules aiming at facilitating and regulating contacts and relations between entities and people involved in diplomatic exchanges — either in war or in peace.[34] Such as diplomacy itself, diplomatic law is a modern concept, though its main component regarding diplomatic immunity, for example, has been recognized at all times and by all civilizations. Though it is nowadays considered as a branch of international law, and is therefore highly codified, it was not always the case. Indeed, it is recognized that diplomatic law emerged from customary practice, and thus was in many cases not clearly put into writings.[35] While this is certainly the case in the premodern Islamic context, Islamic law, and more importantly the Islamic International law *siyar*, nevertheless addresses some aspects of the rules governing diplomatic contacts, such as the immunity and inviolability of the diplomatic agents, or the rules concerning the establishment of treaties and safe-conduct.[36] Other rules, closer to the customary practices could be highlighted as well based on other types of material.

Islamic International law or *Siyar*, has over the years been the object of increasing scholarly attention.[37] This current volume once more attest of this interest. It is thus not our goal here to review this concept and its development, but rather to concentrate on what it had to say about diplomatic practices, especially since it seems that in that specific domain, *siyar* was way more flexible, and went beyond the traditional sources of law. Indeed, as a branch of Islamic law, *siyar* naturally shared with it its sources, such as the *Qurʾān* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, but it also made great use of the recognized methods of *ijtihad,* such as *ijmāʿ* (consensus) and *qiyās (*analogical deduction), to complement the divine sources, when needed.[38] Even more importantly in the framework of diplomacy, *siyar* also accepted various principles as legal mechanism or tool of interpretation, that have been sometimes considered as more controversial in other branch of the law, such as the *maṣlaḥah* (public interest), the *ʿurf* (prevailing local custom) and the practices of the Caliphs and Islamic rulers.[39]

Such a focus on so-called alternative sources and methods of law can easily be justified by the fact that the Qurʿān and Sunnah in fact address only few — though important — aspects of the diplomatic practices. Prime among them is the question related to the immunity and inviolability of the messengers. Though this practice long predated the coming of Islam, and

[34] Ismail, M.-B. A., *Islamic Law and Transnational Diplomatic Law*: 21-22.
[35] *Ibid.*: 7.
[36] *Ibid.* : 5.
[37] This is especially the case since the publication of Shaybānī's *Kitāb al-Siyar*, by Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Law of Nations. Shaybānī's Siya*r, (Johns Hopkins Press, 1966). See also more recently Bouzenita, A.I., "The *Siyar* — An Islamic Law of Nations?," *Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 35 (2007): 19-46; M.-L. Frick, A.Th., Müller (Eds.), *Islam and International Law. Engaging Self-Centrism from a Plurality of Perspectives*, (Brill, 2013).
[38] Ismail, M.-B. A., *Islamic Law and Transnational Diplomatic Law*: 52-58.
[39] Ibid. : 59-62.

therefore could fall under the *ʿurf*, it has also clearly been recognized and addressed in the Qurʿān. The meeting of Prophet Solomon and the Queen of Sheba recalled in *Sūrat al-Naml* is a very telling example.[40] This concern for the immunity of the messengers is in fact to be linked to the special place messengers (*rusul*) hold in Islam, as apostles of God. Numerous *sūrāt* attest for this.[41]

It is however in the *Sunnah* that we find the most explicit cases and examples that dealt not only with the immunity, but also the inviolability of the diplomatic agents. The Prophet Muḥammad indeed recognized, and himself made great use of diplomacy through the sending of envoys to tribal chiefs and rulers inside and outside Arabia. When himself receiving messengers, he supposedly did so, in a special place within his mosque in Medina that had been reserved for the reception of the envoys, that was called *ustuwanāt al-wufūd*.[42] His primary goal with diplomacy was to announce to the world the new religion and to call the people to embrace it. His sending of envoys to the foreign kings of Byzantium, Persia, Ethiopia, Egypt, thus further attest of the importance of the messenger for their role in the spread of Islam and in the processes of acquaintance, cooperation and communication mentioned earlier. The accounts of his reception of messengers on the other hand represent a clear example of how those envoys were valued and respected in Islam, and how sacred their immunity and inviolability were. The Prophet's response to Musaylimah's envoys' offense and denial, for instance, is often taken as example and precedent for the respect of envoys' immunity: "*By God, if it were not the tradition that envoys could not be killed, I would have severed your heads*."[43]

Directly linked to the question of the immunity is that of the *amān*, or safe-conduct. Based on the Qurʿān (9:6) — "*And if any one of the idolators seeks your protection, then grant him protection so that he may hear the words of God. Then deliver him to his place of safety"*— and the Prophet's example and quote — "The blood of believers is equal, and the weakest of them may offer protection in their name, for they are united against outsiders—,"[44] protection should be offered to travelers and people in Islamic domains. It should be noted that the *amān* is not restricted to non-Muslim, but also could be delivered to Muslims.[45] Though it would seem logical that *amān* would be granted to messengers, it was, apparently, not the case, as it was "assumed"— unlike for the merchants.[46] The mere carrying of the letter of his sender usually vouches for the envoy's immunity and his recognition as *mustaʾmīn* (possessor of an *amān*).[47] In the practice, this status assured messengers personal inviolability,[48] immunity from court's jurisdiction,[49] freedom of religion,[50] and exemption from taxes.[51]

---

[40] Qurʿān (27 : 15-44). Also commented in Ismail, M.-B. A., *Islamic Law and Transnational Diplomatic Law*: 102.
[41] Qurʿān (2 :151, 119) ; (4 :165) ; (5 :19) ; (14 :4) ; (33 : 45-46) ; (69 : 10) ; (73 :15-16).
[42] Ismail, M.-B. A., *Islamic Law and Transnational Diplomatic Law*: 36.
[43] Ibn Hishām's *Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah*, quoted in Ismail, M.-B. A., *Islamic Law and Transnational Diplomatic Law*: 37.
[44] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 13:321. Also see Wansbrough, J., "The Safe-Conduct in Muslim Chancery," *BSOAS* 34/1 (1971): 20-35.
[45] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 13:329.
[46] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 13:322.
[47] Bsoul, L.A.n « Islamic Diplomacy » : 136, referring to Abū Yūsuf.
[48] Ismail, M.-B. A., *Islamic Law and Transnational Diplomatic Law*: 103-105.
[49] Ibid. : 105-106.
[50] Ibid. : 106-107.
[51] Ibid. : 107-108.

If the existence of the *amān* is crucial as it clearly established and codified the rules of immunity in general, it is also of great importance as it somehow represents a forerunner in the practice of treaty making, which is usually considered as the main goal of diplomacy. Indeed, the *amān* grants the *ḥarbī* (someone living in the *dār al-ḥarb*) a legal status that would otherwise be denied to him, and therefore it officializes some sort of truce between him and his host. This close link between the *amān* and the peace treaty (*muʿāhadah* or *ṣulḥ*) is obvious when we look at its classification in official chancery manual.[52] Be that as it may, let us now turn to this major aspect and principle of Islamic diplomacy, namely the treaty.

Treaty making in Islam is indeed considered by jurists as a founding principle of Islamic diplomatic law. The Qurʿān has authorized and prescribed it as attested by the *Sūrat al-Anfal* (8:61)[53] and *al-Tawbah* (9:2).[54] But it is especially the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah between the Prophet and the Quraysh in Mecca in 628 that "establishes the legal basis for its application."[55] This treaty, that officially recognized the Prophet Muḥammad as an equal interlocutor of the Quraysh, also set the precedent for the way treaties would be negotiated and concluded. It also sanctioned the principle of diplomatic immunity as well as the validity of international agreements.[56] The course of the negotiation (*murāwaḍah)* that took place between the Prophet and the Meccans to allow the *ummah* to perform the *ʿumrah* indeed illustrates the important value Muḥammad gave not only to peaceful settlement, but also to the good treatment of the envoys.[57] As for the terms concluded, they were to be considered by jurists as law and a model to follow. The duration of the treaty for example, 10 years, was recognized by many jurists as a rule for future treaties — though not all schools of law agree on this interpretation.[58]

Next to the duration of the treaties, other conditions were highlighted by the Islamic law — based on the precedents. First and foremost, the status of the Muslim concluding party varied based on the status of the non-Muslim party. For example, only the caliph could conclude truce with the Byzantine emperor and the ruler of India.[59] Peace with non-Muslim rulers of lesser importance could be concluded with other Muslim entities, as it will be increasingly the case during the period of the Crusades.[60] The truce should also be made in the interest *maṣlaḥah* of the Muslim party, and not included any clauses not recognized by Islam.[61]

---

[52] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 13:321. The *amānāt* inaugurates the group of the "contracts of peace" or treaties.

[53] "*If the enemy is inclined towards peace, make peace with them*."

[54] This verse that in fact refers more to the *amān* is usually quoted in the context of the treatymaking with "Infidels": *"You 'polytheists' may travel freely through the land for 4 months*".

[55] Ismail, M.-B. A., *Islamic Law and Transnational Diplomatic Law*: 98.

[56] Ibid. : 98-99.

[57] Ibid. : 98-101.

[58] Bsoul, L..A., *International Treaties (Muʿāhadāt) in Islam. Theory and Practice in the Light of Islamic International Law (Siyar) according to Orthodox Schools*, (University Press of America, 2008): 117-120. The period of four months stipulated in Qurʿān (9:2) is also taken as standard for the Shāfiʿī school, in the case that the Muslim party was strong, and ten years if they were weak. See al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshāʾ*, 14:8.

[59] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshāʾ*, 14:7.

[60] Holt, P.M., *Earlu Mamluk Diplomacy (1260-1290). Treaties of Baybars and Qalāwūn with Christian Rulers.* (Brill, 1995); Köhler, M.A., *Alliances and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers in the Middle East. Cross-Cultural Diplomacy in the Period of the Crusades.* (Brill, 2013): 277-312.

[61] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshāʾ*, 14:7.

With the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah, another important aspect of the treaty was also then established, that would be set as rule, namely the fulfilment of all the terms of treaty, as ordered by Qurʿān (5:1): "O you who believe! Fulfil [your] obligations."[62] This obligation is in fact indirectly linked to another principle that is crucial to diplomatic law, namely the principle of reciprocity. As correctly put by Muhammad-Basheer Ismail, the rule pertaining to reciprocity "forms the basis of the universal international order and (….) is deeply embedded in international customary law."[63] Though suggested in the Qurʿān,[64] the principle of reciprocity, such as that of immunity, in fact long predated Islam and was recognized and incorporated as *ʿurf* or prevailing (local) custom. This principle however, such as many other aspects of the diplomatic practice, has been much less described and commented by jurists in the premodern period.

As mentioned previously, much of the practices that would nowadays been associated to diplomacy have not per se been addressed neither by the Qurʿān nor by the Prophetic traditions. Therefore, jurists very early on accepted the used of *ʿurf* (customs) and the examples of the caliphs (and later on other Islamic rulers) as sources for diplomatic law. Though not clearly established, one could even argue that the model of foreign customs could also be taken as model for Islamic practice, this based on the principle of reciprocity. After all, after he heard that foreign rulers would not read an unsealed letter, the Prophet had his ring made with his name and title engraved *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* to seal his correspondence.[65]

If some of those customs and practices have been at time mentioned by jurists, it is in fact to other types of works that we should turn to get a better idea of the diplomatic practices in Islam during the medieval period. Indeed, unlike jurists, secretaries and administrators have been particularly prolific when it comes to describe the modalities underlying the exchanges, especially those concerning the drafting of documents involved in the contacts. The practices of document writing being also based on the precedent and the famous examples of the Prophet and his successors, we can have in their works a concrete list of those sanctioned cases to be followed. In that respect, it seems that diplomacy was more a matter of administrative rather than legal concerns. Stories linked to diplomacy have also increasingly been included in historical works, especially in chronicles, that detailed yet another aspect of the practice, that linked to the reception of the embassies and the conduct of the exchanges. It is there that we learned more about the envoys and other staff involved, the details and description of the gifs exchanged, etc. Before going into these specific aspects however, it is important to address the question of customs and precedents and what was there used as model to follow.

In the case of the medieval Islamic context, we are lucky that this reliance on the precedent and examples of previous rulers has been thoroughly recorded over time by administrators. Two types of works, more particularly, are useful as they have either discussed the role and

[62] Many other sūrāt encourages to respect and honor the terms of contracts or obligations: Qurʿān (16:91-92); (17:34); (9:4, 7)
[63] Ismail, M.-B. A., *Islamic Law and Transnational Diplomatic Law*:75.)
[64] Qurʿān (2:194). Other *sūrāt* also more clearly refers to cases where the believers should not reciprocate when the principles goes against Islam (16:126) and (9:7).
[65] Bsoul, L.A., "Islamic Diplomacy": 140.

function attached to diplomacy — this through the focus on its principal figure, the ambassadors—, or they clearly mentioned the precedents to be used as model of actions. The first type of works belongs to the so-called *Advice Literature* genre, also known as *Mirror for Princes literature*. One of the first sample of those texts, which is also the most important one, was drafted in the 10th century by Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad, better known as Ibn al-Farrāʾ (ca. 425/1024) and bears the title of *Kitāb Rusul al-Mulūk*.[66] Against the backdrop of Arab-Byzantine relations and exchanges, the *Kitāb Rusul al-Mulūk* is a manual that elaborates on the moral and ethical aspect of the function of messenger and of the role of diplomacy. Diplomacy appears here as an alternative to warfare, that is both supported and encouraged by the various sources of law, but more importantly diplomacy is here closely link to statecraft—the sending of messengers being presented as an attribute of kingship.[67] Though first focused on the traditional sources of law, Ibn al-Farrāʾ's text increasingly includes references to the customary practice to follow. Prime among them are of course the references to the model of the Prophet and the early caliphs, but very soon Ibn al-Farrāʾ also turned to the pre-Islamic models of the Persians,[68] Indians,[69] Greeks[70] and Arabs.[71] Also most relevant here is that Ibn al-Farrāʾ also uses in his work the Byzantine model itself as example to be followed —[72] recognising thus the practices of the foreign kings in general as basis of the diplomatic practice.

The second group of works discussing diplomacy and the precedent to follow belongs to the category of administrative literature. Chancery manuals were indeed very much concerned with the good — and correct — working of the state, and they therefore meticulously detailed all the administrative tasks undertaken. The first samples of such works, bearing the title of *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, were originally devoted to fiscal and taxation issues.[73] Over time however, the parts in those administrative manuals, devoted to chancery practices, increased significantly — attesting therefore of the increasing importance of diplomacy. Indeed, state chanceries were usually in charge of the writing of all the documents involved in the diplomatic exchanges, be it in times of war or peace. It was thus essential for secretaries to be aware of the rules and models to follow. The best, and most famous of those work, is that of the 15th century Mamluk secretary, al-Qalqashandī. This compendium, entitled *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshāʾ fī ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ(Dawn for the Night-Blind regarding the Composition of Chancery production)* and edited in 15 volumes, is a perfect example of Mamluk encyclopedism.[74] More importantly for us here is that al-Qalqashandī has compiled an true encyclopedia on the art of documents, but also on the working of Islamic chanceries since the beginning of Islam until his days. Doing so, he has described all the rules pertaining to the writing of letters, treaties and any official

[66] The importance of the work was first highlighted by the Syrian scholar Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Munajjid who edited it in 1947 (reprinted in 1972). It was made known to an even broader public in 2015, through the translation (and annotation) done by Maria Vaiou, *Diplomacy in the Early Islamic World A Tenth-Century Treatise on Arab-Byzantine Relations. The Book of Messengers of Kings (Kitāb Rusul al-Mulūk) of Ibn al-Farrāʾ*, (I.B. Tauris, 2015).
[67] Ibid. : 2.
[68] Ibn Farrāʾ, *Kitāb Rusul al-mulūk*: 50-53.
[69] Ibid.: 57.
[70] Ibid.: 60-61.
[71] Ibid.: 58-59.
[72] Ibid.: 64-74.
[73] The two most famous of such works are those of Abū Yūsuf (d. 798) and Qudāma Ibn Jaʿfar (d. ca. mid-10th cent.)
[74] On this topic, see Muhanna, E., *The World in a Book. Al-Nuwayrī and the Islamic Encyclopedic Tradition,* (Princeton and Oxford, 2018).

documents, and reproduced many examples from the various periods. Those examples were indeed crucial for secretaries who used them as reference points, they could copy, imitate or even quote and refer to. In one way, the *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshāʾ* could be seen as a true archives of diplomatic examples and precedents.[75]

Based on this latter — and other similar — work, it seems once more that the true function of diplomacy as practiced in Islam, had in fact very little to do with the making of peace and the conclusion of treaties. This part of the work devoted to this issue in fact only come last in the encyclopeadia (volumes 13 and 14). What seems to matter the most was in fact to stay in communication with all people and nations as prescribed by Qurʿān (49:13), since 5 volumes of the edited work are in fact focused on the writing and sending of letters to the kings, once more attesting to the strong link between diplomacy and kingship. Based on this work, we are thus way more informed of the role given to "diplomacy" by medieval Muslim actors themselves. Al-Qalqashandī for example enumerates some twenty-four themes to be developed in diplomatic letters — prime among them, the letter of accession to the throne and assertion of sovereignty.[76] The examples of letters kept over time indeed show this trends, especially when it comes to intra-Muslim diplomatic relations.[77] There were however, even more themes to be discussed that al-Qalqashandī does not mention, maybe due to their common aspect.[78] Also most noticeable is that this encyclopeadia also include many examples of letters exchanges with non-Muslim rulers (*mulūk al-kuffār*), attesting thus to regular diplomatic contacts between the 2 worlds, that were not pertaining to the treaties.[79]

While focusing on the most important — and tangible— aspect of diplomacy, advice and administrative literature has nevertheless not neglected to address the key figure of those exchanges — the envoy or ambassador—, nor the various rules regarding their reception at court.

ENVOYS

We have already mentioned the sacred character of the envoy *rasūl (*plur. *rusul*), due to his role in the spread of Islam to the world. This is not only supported by numerous verses in the Qurʾān, but also by the Prophetic tradition that has kept the records of all the messengers sent by the Prophet to the local Arab tribes and foreign rulers.[80] As early as the reigns of the

[75] For each category of documents, al-Qalqashandī indeed first provide a definition, then a detailed explanation of the legality of the practices, providing examples from the Qurʾān and Sunnah, before moving to concrete examples of documents that were considered as the norm to follow. Each period and important Islamic realm is represented.

[76] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshāʾ*, 8: 233-358.

[77] It is was customary for sultans to send letters to their important counterparts (both within the Islamic world and outside) to inform them of their accession to the throne. Sultans also expected less important rulers to send their congratulations. They sometimes even sent letters of complaint when these were not coming. See Dekkiche, *Le Caire, Carrefour des Ambassades,* 1: 173-174.

[78] A very common theme during the Mamluk period, was for example, the request for the protection of important pilgrims.

[79] Next to the Prophet's letters to the foreign kings already mentioned, al-Qalqashandī has also kept various samples from the various dynasties (Abbasids, Buyids, Fatimids, Ayyubids) with the Byzantines, the Franks, and Sicily. But the most examples comes from the Mamluk period, see al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshāʾ*, 8: 25-54.

[80] Ibn Farrāʾ, *Kitāb Rusul al-mulūk*: 24-27.

Rashīdūn caliphs however, the role and functions of the messengers seem to have evolved and diversified as to fit to the requirement of the *ad hoc* mission they were assigned. Messengers thus became the representative of their rulers, the official bearer of their letters and the transmitter of their words, and when needed the negotiator of their peace. For that reason, envoys were increasingly given attention in the specific type of literature designed for the kings, the *Advice literature*.

We have already mentioned the most famous one, by Ibn al-Farrāʾ, *Kitāb Rusul al-Mulūk.* Ibn al-Farrāʾ's work is in fact quite unique in its genre and treatment of the topic, and it is therefore a unique source. While discussing diplomacy generally, the *K. Rusul al-mulūk* in fact mostly does so through its treatment the principal figure carrying that duty, the messenger. Over the 21 chapters, Ibn al-Farrāʾ covers all the qualities, skills, appearance, and attributes required and expected of the messengers to serve the kings. He complements his accounts with examples — positive and negative— taken from both the pre-Islamic and early Islamic pasts, insisting therefore on the long legacy the tradition of sending messenger has. This is particularly interesting for our topic here, since it once more shows how this practice was related to the longstanding tradition of the kings over time, which Muslim rulers have joined — recognizing therefore the primacy of that custom and its adoption by Islam.

Though this work is quite exceptional, it must also be noted that it presents a rather restricted picture of the ambassador, which fits in fact quite well with the normative genre of the *Advice literature*. Indeed, the picture it gave of the figure of the messenger was certainly more an ideal picture of the "perfect ambassador" than a reality. Furthermore, if Ibn al-Farrāʾ is much prolific while describing the quality and skills of the ambassadors and how those should serve the success of the mission, he is however more silent concerning their mission itself and the ambassador's task. Indeed, based on this work, it seems that the ambassador was mostly granted two tasks, namely delivering the letter and the oral message from his king to the king he was sent to.[81] Quoting a wise man, Ibn al-Farrāʾ indeed noted: "the letter will not achieve its aim, unless a messenger [is sent] with it," since as said another wise man: "the letter is a hand and the messenger is the tongue."[82] His tongue, the messenger was required to use it the best way possible to achieve whatever goal he was assigned, such as a truce, a reconciliation, a debate or any other kind of assignment.[83]

Concerning the functions of the ambassador, another major representative of the genre of *Advice literature* by the most famous Seljuq vizier Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092), *Siyasat-name* or *Siyar al-Mulūk* described them more explicitly — tough more briefly, since only one chapter in the entire book is devoted to the topic. The role and function of the ambassadors are there however truly elevated as an essential pillar supporting kingship.[84] According to that author indeed, the role of the messenger exceeds greatly the rhetoric one described above, since "It should be realized that when kings send ambassadors to one another their purpose is not merely the message or the letter which they communicate openly, but secretly they have a

[81] Ibn Farrāʾ, *Kitāb Rusul al-mulūk*: 30-31.
[82] Translation of Ibn al-Farrāʾ in Vaiou, M., *Diplomacy in the Early Islamic World*: 63.
[83] Ibid. : 66.
[84] Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings. The* Siyar al-Muluk *or* Siyasat-nama *of Nizam al-Mulk*, translated by H. Darke (Routledge, 2002; 1st published in 1960)

hundred other points and object in view"[85] — the messenger being with this author, the eyes in addition to the tongue of his kings, equalling thus the function of the envoys to that of the spies. Be that as it may, while being more specific as for how messengers should serve their kings the best, Niẓām al-Mulk agrees in all respects with his predecessor as for what constitute the most important attributes and qualities required for the function:[86]

"For an embassy a man is required who has served kings, who is bold in speaking, who has travelled widely, who has a portion of every branch of learning, who is retentive of memory and far-seeing, who is tall and handsome, and if he is old and wise, that is better. If a boon-companion is sent who is brave and manly, skilled in arms and horsemanship, and renowned as duellist, it will be extremely good too, for he will shew the world that our men are like him; and if an ambassador be a man of noble family that will be good too, for they will have respect for his ancestry and not do him any mischief; and he should not be a wine-bibber, a buffoon, a gambler, a babbler or a simpleton. Very often kings have sent envoys bearing gifts or money and valuables and sued for peace and shewn themselves weak and submissive; after giving this illusion they have followed up by sending prepared troops and picked men in to the attack and defeating the enemy. The conduct and good sense of an ambassador are a guide to the conduct, wisdom, judgement and greatness of his king."[87]

Several centuries later, the Mamluk authors, Ibn al-ʿAbbāsī (14th cent.) and al-Qalqashandī (15th cent.), also addressed the function of the ambassadors in their work. Though both works are of different nature, — Ibn al-ʿAbbāsī's *Athār al-uwal fī tartīb al-duwal* is another work in the genre of *Advice literature*, while al-Qalqashandī' *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*ʾ is a chancery manual—, they are both more and more specific as for the required qualities and functions of the ambassadors.[88] Indeed, if they still points as the same general qualities expressed by Niẓām al-Mulk, — such as the intelligence, courage, integrity, and loyalty —, they also addresses and focuses on some other more particularly. Prime among those are of course the fact that the messenger should be a Muslim and of noble descendant, but also that he should be a good interpreter — following therefore the Qurʾān's instruction *"And never have sent forth any messenger otherwise than [with a message] in his own's people tongue, so that he might make [the truth] clear to them."*[89] This language ability was indeed increasingly required in the late medieval world, with the increasing number and variety of powers who were exchanging embassies. While it was not required from the ambassador that he himself translated the letter he brought, he still had to deliver the oral message. This was to be done in the language of his host.[90]

So next to the picture of the perfect ambassador, writings over time increasingly describe the practice attached to the choice and function of the ambassadors. Al-ʿAbbasī for example is

[85] Ibid. : 95.

[86] For a longer description of the ambassador's required qualities in Ibn Farrāʾ see particularly chapter 6 in Vaiou, M., *Diplomacy in the Early Islamic World*: 66-68.

[87] Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*, 98.

[88] Al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal fī tartīb al-duwal*, (Beyrouth, 1989):191-195; Al-Qalqashandī, Ṣubḥ al-aʿshà 6: 358-361.

[89] Qurʾān (4 :14).

[90] Al-Qalqashandī, Ṣubḥ al-aʿshà 6: 359; 8: 77-78, refers to an anecdote concerning a messenger coming from India who had delivered a letter in a language no one could translate. The messenger himself was thus asked to translate it.

one of the first to clearly point to the fact that an ambassador only rarely travelled alone. Indeed, according to him each delegation should be constituted of a man of the sword (military), a man of the turban (religious scholar) and a man of the pen (secretary),[91] who be respectively in charge of: assessing "the host's capacity for warfare", helping "the members of the mission to behave according to Islamic law," and ensuring "that everyone conformed to diplomatic protocol."[92] That being said, whether the ambassador himself belonged to one of the other group did not seem to be established in advance, and most probably depended of the mission itself. Furthermore, rulers were usually quite pragmatic when it came to the choice of the messengers.

It has very often been considered that status — be it nobility, ascendancy or prestige— was the key factor in the choice of the messenger. One of reason for this could be as stated by Niẓām al-Mulk that "if an ambassador be a man of noble family that will be good too, for they will have respect for his ancestry and not do him any mischief."[93] But most probably, this focus on the status translated a major concern for hierarchy more generally. The role granted to the status was double. On the one hand, sending an envoy of high status or prestigious ascendency was a manner to enhance the sending ruler's own status, since it was reflected through the messenger's person. On the other hand, it also demonstrated the degree of consideration and respect the sending ruler gave to his correspondent. This is obvious from the accounts we possess of the reception of embassies are recorded in the chronicles.[94]

As already mentioned, the Mamluk period is quite a goldmine for the study of diplomacy — this compared to previous period—, due to the great number of extant sources that dealt with diplomatic contacts.[95] Prime among them are of course the numerous chronicles that have very frequently recorded the arrivals of embassies in Cairo, but there are also various collections of letters that have kept the copies of the original letters that were sent between the Mamluks and their many correspondents. Those two sources combined are of course of prime importance as for the information they provide us concerning the receptions of those embassies as we will see, but also at times concerning the ambassadors themselves. Though those mentions of the messengers (usually referred to as *qāṣid*; plur. *quṣṣād*) are irregular — usually those mentions are restricted to very exceptional missions — they are rather informative. We indeed find there many references of ambassadors by name and function, which allow us sometimes to track them back in the various biographical dictionaries.

Based on this materials, other rules pertaining to the choice of the ambassadors can therefore be drawn. For example, next to language skills, it was usually preferred for the ambassadors to have travelled broadly, and to have a good knowledge not only of the roads, but also of the culture of his host — this in order to avoid some unpleasant *faux-pas.* But more importantly

[91] Al-ʿAbbāsī, *Āthār al-uwal*: 191-192.
[92] Broadbridge, A., « Careers in Diplomacy among Mamluks and Mongols, 658-741/1260-1341," in F. Bauden and M. Dekkiche (eds.), *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies. Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics* (Brill, 2019): 263-264.
[93] Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*, 98.
[94] Dekkiche, M., « Diplomacy at Its Zenith: Material Culture of Mamluk-Timurid Diplomacy in the Ninth/Fifteenth century," in F. Bauden, *Culture matérielle et contacts diplomatiques entre l'Occident latin, Byzance et l'Orient islamique (xie-xvie siècles),* (Brill, 2021): 115-142.
[95] Dekkiche, M., « Mamluk Diplomacy, A present state of Research", in in F. Bauden and M. Dekkiche (eds.), *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies. Studies on Diplomacy and Diplomatics* (Brill, 2019): 122-182.

even was that those messengers who had travelled broadly usually had an extended social network they could use to ease their mission. Though messengers usually travelled with their credentials — the letters and the gifts they brought—, they sometimes needed a better introduction to the rulers, which could be assured by their networks. Being well connected could also be seen a gage of prestige which rulers could greatly appreciate.[96] Though the profession of ambassador did not exist then — the messengers were usually sent for *ad hoc* missions —, an extensive experience of travel to particular region, could have messengers sent repeatedly to a same ruler and region. This focus of the importance of travels and the existence of a social networks both on the road and at destination explains that merchants were very often used to conduct diplomatic missions along with their own business. Though those usually are kept silent in most works dealing with ambassadors, Mamluk chronicles mentioned many cases of their use, especially in the contacts between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanids.[97]

A last group involved in the diplomatic contacts was only recently put into light by Anne Broadbridge's study "Careers in Diplomacy," namely the entourages of the rulers: "Because official diplomats were constrained in their activities and behavior, it was only members of the entourages who could seize the opportunities that arose from traveling, meeting new people, and escaping familiar society. For some, these opportunities were merely personal, but for the truly ambitious man with nerves of steel, a place in the entourage could just possibly lead to employment, reward, and a dazzling future." [98] Such as the previous comment by al-ʿAbbāsī concerning the composition of the delegation, Broadbridge's study also points to the fact that the messenger did not act alone, and the success of the mission thus did not depend on that single person.

Be that as it may, we cannot deny the messenger his key role. Nor can we deny that he was the first and major recipient of his host's favors and generosity as well as his angers. Immunity has already been described as one, —if not in fact the most— important rule regarding the establishment of diplomatic contact. Though the immunity of the messengers is recognized as an atemporal universal practice, no one has ever denied that those sent on the roads did not face many dangers. After all, most of the authors mentioned above include in the required qualities of the emissary strength and courage. Or even as Ibn al-Farrāʾ puts it: "The messenger needs also to be long-suffering and to have control of his temper as much as he needs patience for the duration of his stay. For if the messenger sometimes is sent and presented to a light-minded and disrespectful [ruler], who insults him with foul words, he may be overcome by the force of anger, and be seized by the power of rage so that his determination and resolution are undermined. As a result, he will not be able to present his arguments well and carry out his mission successfully."[99]

If the immunity of the messenger was seen as a prerequisite for the establishment of good diplomatic relations, our sources in fact mention many cases of bad treatment given to the

[96] Dekkiche, M., *Le Caire, Carrefour des ambassades.* Ph.D. thesis, (University of Liège, 2011), 1: 49.

[97] Broadbridge, A., « Careers in Diplomacy": 272-275. As correctly mentioned by Broadbridge, the use of merchants as ambassadors has remained very much understudied and should be given more attention in the future.

[98] Ibid., 275.

[99] Translation of Ibn al-Farrāʾ in Vaiou, M., *Diplomacy in the Early Islamic World*: 71.

ambassadors. While it is true that only few rulers indeed crossed the line and killed the ambassadors, many others dangerously came close to that.[100] The rules pertaining to the immunity of the envoy indeed mostly prevent for the killing of the messengers but did not establish any rules preventing humiliation and harassment. In time of conflict or tensions, messengers thus occasionally suffered in the hand of their hosts. Those mistreatments of course also translated a game of power through which rulers wanted to impress and show their strength to their guests. Next to the dramatic event of the deliberate murder of the messengers, there were also many cases of unexpected death, either on the road or during the time of the ambassador's stay at a foreign court. Though those were of course not considered as the host ruler's responsibility, he nevertheless was expected to follow the rule of immunity regarding the deceased's belongings. In case of good relations, the host usually also honored the dead for respect to his master.[101]

This brings us now to the last — and probably most important — point related to diplomacy, namely the reception of the ambassadors. Indeed, though the envoy has been presented as the key figure of the exchanges, he was only so as the representative of the ruler who had dispatched him. If advice and administrative literature greatly focus on the attribute, role and function of the ambassadors and their required qualities and skills, they also extensively address the way rulers should act when hosting those messengers. *Advice literature* was after all designed as guide for kings, and since the sending — and receiving — was considered as an attribute of kingship, kings should respect a certain code of conduct. In the last section, the rules peculiar to the reception of ambassadors will thus be described.

Diplomatic Practice

"When ambassadors come from foreign countries nobody is aware of their movements until they actually arrive at the city gates; and nobody makes any preparation for them or gives them anything; and they will surely attribute this to our negligence and indifference. So officers at the frontiers must be told that whenever anyone approaches their stations they should at once despatch a rider [to the capital] and report who is who is coming, how many men there are with him, mounted and unmounted, how much baggage and equipment he has, and what is his business. A trustworthy person must be appointed to accompany them and conduct them to the nearest big city; there he will hand them over to another agent who will likewise go with them to the next city and district, and so on until they reach the court. Whenever they arrive at a place where there is cultivation, it must be a standing order that officers, tax-collectors and assignees should give them hospitality at every stopping place and entertain them well so that they depart satisfied. When they return, the same procedure is to be followed. Whatever treatment is given to an ambassador; whether good or bad, it is as if were done to the very king who sent him; and kings have always shewn the greatest respect to one another and treated envoys well, for by this their own dignity has been enhanced not diminished."[102]

---

[100] Sinor, D., "Diplomatic Practices in Medieval Inner Asia," in C.E. Bosworth et al (Eds.), *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times*, (Princeton, 1989): 343 (on the killing of Gengis Khan's ambassadors by the ruler of the Khwarazm). On the bad treatment of the ambassadors see Broadbridge, A.F., *Kinship and Ideology* and Dekkiche, M., « Diplomacy at Its Zenith".

[101] Dekkiche, M., « Diplomacy at Its Zenith": 132.

[102] Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*, 94-95.

Niẓām al-Mulk's quote points here to crucial aspects of the diplomacy as it was practiced in his time — a practice that would in fact be perpetuated with only slight changes until the Mamluk period. First and foremost, diplomacy, to be performed correctly, depended on a thorough knowledge of the potential interlocutors. This interest for the world — in all its aspects— is well illustrated with the increasing production of works devoted to geography since the 9th century. But this concern is even more flagrant with the development of a particular type of geography in the 10th century, the so-called human geography, that will constitute the bulk of knowledge to be used in diplomacy.[103] Human geography, better known as the *masālik wa'l-mamālik* literature, indeed describes not only the itineraries and various realms of the Islamic world, but also the ruling elite and their subjects, their strength and weakness, customs and resources. This literature is very interesting, since while attempting to defend the ideal of an *mamlakat al-islām* matching the legal concept of the *dār al-islām*, it in fact recognized *de facto* the existence of a multitude a co-existing realms — *mamlaka* being increasingly described as a "political realm."[104] While it originally mostly focused on Islamic realms, authors, especially within the administration, also started including non-Islamic realms as well.[105] As correctly put by Zayde Antrim, this material acted "as a powerful vehicle for articulating desire, claiming authority, and establishing belonging,"[106] and it surely was used as such in the framework of diplomacy.

Knowing about the potential correspondents, friends and enemies, was indeed essential for the good conduct of diplomacy. In that literature, each realm was described as viewed from the center — either Baghdad or Cairo based on the authors— and in relation with it. Over the centuries some territories had acquired a prestige that conferred its ruler a certain legitimacy to power. This very status was the basis on which diplomatic contacts were established. Indeed, hierarchy seems to have been the basic organizing principle that determined the entire set of rules and protocol — following in this a longstanding tradition based on customs.[107] Mirroring Niẓām al-Mulk's quote above, al-Qalqashandī was, four centuries later, indeed more explicit in his description of the arrivals of ambassadors, stating that "if the king who sent him is of high standing (such as one of the khans among the eastern kings), some of the great amirs, such as the viceregent, the great chamberlain and their like, go out to meet him; he is lodged in the sultan's palaces at the polo-ground, which is the most eminent of the ambassadors' lodgings. If he is of lower status, he is met by the master of ceremonies; the *dawādār* seeks permission for his entry, and lodges him in the guest-house, or in some place according to his rank."[108]

This rule of hierarchy that was during the Mamluk period quite outspoken, was in fact the result of a longstanding tradition and seem to have been recognized by all. If most of the time, the rule of status reflected the "geo-political" context, it is through the administrative and chancery practice that we need to turn to get a better sense of those status and how they materialized in the practice. I have detailed elsewhere how for example, the Mamluk chancery

[103] Dekkiche, M., « Diplomatics, or Another Way to the See the World," in F. Bauden and M. Dekkiche (eds.), *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies* (Brill, 2019): 185-198.
[104] Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, ed ʿA.A. b. Y. al-Sarīhī, (Abu Dhabi, 2003-4), 1: 28.
[105] Dekkiche, M., « Diplomatics": 185-198.
[106] Antrim, Z., *Routes and Realms. The Power of Place in Early Islamic World* (Oxford University Press, 2012): 1
[107] Dekkiche, M., « Diplomatics": 198-212; Dekkiche, M., « Diplomacy at Its Zenith": 115-142.
[108] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshāʾ*, 4:58-59 (translated in Holt, P., *Early Mamluk Diplomacy:* 6-7).

used specific rules for writing letters to the various rulers, that best translated their status.[109] Furthermore, the samples from other contemporary dynasties kept in Mamluk collections also attest of very similar practices. Though the Mamluk period is indeed the best documented period, this rule of status and its reflection in epistolary protocol were a longstanding tradition that was not restricted to the kings only, but also applied to other category of notables within a same society.[110]

Be that as it may, this rule of hierarchy had an immense impact of the conduct of diplomacy, as it regulated not only the rules of letter-writing, but more importantly the way the envoys would be received at court. Al-Qalqashandī's quote above is quite clear on this: the status of the correspondent determined the status of the welcoming delegation, the residence granted to the ambassadors, but also his daily allowance and the quantity of food and quality of entertainment he was offered.[111] Other factors, such as the degree of friendship — or enmity— could also influence the degree of freedom allowed to the envoys, especially regarding their mobility. All those aspects are best illustrated in the accounts we find in the chronicles. Indeed, from early date, chroniclers have taken the habits to record the arrivals of embassies in the capital and to describe their reception. Though one can of course doubt of the exactitude of those data recorded — those accounts obviously follow a same narrative pattern —, the combination of different sources has in fact allowed in most cases to corroborate them.

The reception of ambassadors had a very high symbolic value that aimed to impress the messengers.[112] Depending on the rulers' status of course, this was more a less impressive. Every aspect was carefully chosen: the way the streets leading to the court were decorated, the place where the public reception was taking place, the notables surrounding the caliph or sultan, the festivities and banquets organized during the ambassador stay, etc. Even more important were the gifts that were exchanged, which value was carefully recorded and compared. Among those gifts, the robe of honor (*khilʿah*) was of particular importance. Often associated to a symbol of sovereignty, its role in the diplomatic process seems to have been more ambiguous and deserves therefore more scholarly attention. The *khilʿah* appears in many cases to constitute a mark of respect and good treatment given to the ambassadors. This was granted during the departure ceremonies, along with the gifts — to both the ambassador and his ruler.

We have already mentioned that sometimes, tensions between rulers could affect the conduct of diplomacy. This was best seen in the reception of the ambassadors, who were then badly received, publicly humiliated. Despite those breaches in the protocol, rulers were still required to follow a certain standard if they wish to avoid further incidents.[113] This concern

[109] See Dekkiche, M., « Diplomatics": 198-212.
[110] See for example Gully, A., *The Culture of Letter-Writing in Pre-Modern Islamic Society,* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008): 166-192.
[111] Dekkiche, M., « Diplomacy at Its Zenith": 115-142.
[112] Dekkiche, M., « Diplomacy at Its Zenith" and F. Bauden and M. Dekkiche (eds.), *Mamluk Cairo, A Crossroads for Embassies*, are plenty of examples of receptions of ambassadors taking place in Cairo during the Mamluk period.
[113] The example of Mamluk-Timurid relations is in that respect quite telling, see Dekkiche, M. « Diplomacy at Its Zenith".

for the good treatment of the ambassadors is also obvious from the letters of responses we possess and that insist on mentioning the good reception that was offered to the messenger.

It must be noted that there were in fact various receptions given to a same ambassador, though only the first public one was recorded by chroniclers.[114] The good or bad treatments of the messenger took place during this first reception, usually after the handing of the letter. The oral message however only took place on a separate and private reception. If the sultan (or caliph at earlier date) was of course the central figure of the whole process, there were in fact many other officials who were involved and who handled the messengers on a more direct basis. Prime among them was, during the Mamluk period, the *dawādār* (or Inkpot holder), who was in charge of the reception, and the *kātib al-Sirr* (Chief Chancery Secretary), who was responsible for the reading and writing of the letters. Though chroniclers do not highlight their role more explicitly, the few ambassadorial reports we possess do —though, it concerns Christian-Muslim relations and not intra-Muslim ones. [115]

Finally, the ambassador rarely returned home alone. Instead, following the principle of reciprocity, he was accompanied with another messenger, which brought the letter of response and gifts. This back and forth between the various courts assured for constant communication and productive exchanges.

CONCLUSION

Diplomacy as practiced in the Medieval Islamic world was quite a complex system of communication and interaction between political elites, that went way beyond the dichotomy war-peace, that is usually attached to the concept of diplomacy. Though we have here mostly highlighted and focused on the diplomacy performed by the kings, our sources also point to the inclusion of many other actors involved in the process, such as family members or officials, which attest for an open system as well. This open character of Medieval Islamic diplomacy was in fact possible thanks to an open and flexible legal system that allowed diplomacy to be based on alternative sources of law, such as the customs, and the examples of (Islamic) rulers. The present study has attempted to show that a proper study of Islamic diplomacy needs to overcome the simplistic and biased legal analysis to include sources related to statecraft, such as advice literature, administrative manuals, collection of letters and chronicles. More than a legal issue, diplomacy in fact truly belongs to the realm of political culture and should therefore been studied accordingly. The theme would in fact require more interdisciplinary and connected research to allow to reconstitute the share of practices over time and over larger territories and to support a new definition of the field.

[114] Chroniclers only rarely mentioned those, and when they do, it generally concerns exceptional embassies. See Dekkiche, M., « Diplomacy at Its Zenith".

[115] See for example, Felice Brancacci's journal, *Diario di Felice Brancacci ambasciatore con Carlo Federighi al Cairo per il Comune di Firenze,* ed. Catellacci D., in *Archivio storico italiano*, s. 4/8 (1881), 157-188.