

DISCUSSION PAPERS IN DIPLOMACY

***Notes on the origins of the
diplomatic corps:
Constantinople in the 1620s***

G.R. Berridge

No. 92

May 2004

Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'

ISSN 1569-2981

DISCUSSION PAPERS IN DIPLOMACY

Editor: ***Spencer Mawby***, University of Nottingham
Managing Editor: ***Jan Melissen***, Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'

Desk top publishing: ***Daniëlla Kranendonk***

Editorial Board

Karin Aggestam, Lund University
Geoff Berridge, University of Leicester
Rik Coolsaet, University of Ghent
Erik Goldstein, Boston University
Donna Lee, Birmingham University
Paul Sharp, University of Minnesota Duluth

Copyright Notice

© G. R. Berridge 2004

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy, or transmission of this publication, or part thereof in excess of one paragraph (other than as a PDF file at the discretion of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael) may be made without the written permission of the author.

**NOTES ON THE ORIGINS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS:
CONSTANTINOPLE IN THE 1620S**

G.R. Berridge

The diplomatic corps, by which I mean the corporate body of diplomats of all states resident at one post, may well have passed its hey-day but it remains an institution of some significance. It serves as a lobby in defence of diplomatic privileges and immunities, fosters common professional standards, helps to keep down the temperature in many dangerous conflicts, develops friendships that may prove useful down the line – and in its wings some important negotiations still take place.¹ Moreover, in conditions of anarchy, revolution, or deliberately incited xenophobia, even acute political differences between its members are usually set aside in the interests of mutual assistance. This happened three times in China in the course of the twentieth century: in 1900, 1948 and 1967.²

The diplomatic body is embodied most obviously in its dean. This person is generally the longest-serving member of the highest class of diplomat accredited to the country in question. He or she acts as mouthpiece to the government of the receiving state on matters of professional concern as well as the representative of the diplomatic corps on certain ceremonial occasions. The diplomatic body has its own meetings, which are presided over by the dean, who is often supported by a vice-dean. Most members also mix regularly at national day celebrations at their respective embassies, and the corps is seen *en masse* at ceremonial occasions of great importance. London has one of the world's largest and oldest diplomatic corps, so it is not surprising that its corporate existence should be especially pronounced. There

I wish to express my gratitude to the Nuffield Foundation, which provided a grant towards the original research from which this paper grew. This was on the history of the British Embassy in Turkey.

- 1 See, for example, G.R. Berridge and Nadia Gallo, 'The role of the diplomatic corps: the US-North Korea talks in Beijing, 1988-94', in J. Melissen (ed), *Innovation in Diplomatic Practice* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1999).
- 2 Peter Fleming, *The Siege at Peking* (Rupert Hart-Davis: London, 1959); K.M. Panikkar, *In Two Chinas: Memoirs of a diplomat* (Allen and Unwin: London, 1955), ch. 4; and Percy Cradock, *Experiences of China* (John Murray: London, 1994), chs. 5-7.

is a government officer – ‘the marshal of the diplomatic corps’ – who oversees official events involving the diplomatic corps. And it even has a glossy magazine targeted at its members, in effect a house journal: *Diplomat*, published six times a year by a division of Buchan Publishing, which also publishes other periodicals aimed at the same market.³ How much this fosters a sense of corporate identity is anybody’s guess but it is hardly likely to dilute it.

Today, with ambassadors less involved in high-level negotiations, and the diplomatic corps having both exploded in size and witnessed a radical dilution in its cultural homogeneity, Western diplomats in particular, and especially those from the bigger states, tend to be dismissive of it. Nevertheless, those from smaller states are inclined to take it more seriously and have been known to leave an ambassador at the same post for many years in order to ensure that he becomes dean. Clearly, it is wrong to dismiss the diplomatic corps simply because the bigger states dismiss it, and in any case its significance obviously varies from state to state and, within the same state, between one historical period and another. It is, moreover, as old as the Italian Renaissance.

According to Garrett Mattingly, the diplomatic corps originated in Rome, which from the middle of the fifteenth century was the ‘chief training school and jousting field of diplomacy’ and which, as a result, was the destination of the ‘most accomplished diplomats’ of the Italian states. Mattingly adds that their growing *esprit de corps* was probably fostered by the fact that they were ‘laymen in a city of priests’ but even more by the ‘papal practice of addressing them collectively, of assigning them places together at all important ceremonies, and of issuing, from time to time, regulations for their common governance’.⁴ And yet, perhaps because it is the tensions within the diplomatic corps that have caught the eye rather than the common professional interests on which it rests, scholars have sadly neglected it. Indeed, it appears to have been 1737 before the sense of professional solidarity in the diplomatic corps was even noticed in a general work on

3 This division, ‘Diplomat Information Group’, also publishes *Overseas Diplomat*, *Diplomat Hotel and Hospitality Guide*, *Diplomat Education Guide*, and *Diplomat Guide to Scotland*.

4 Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Penguin Books: Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 100.

diplomacy (Pecquet's *Discours sur L'Art de Négocier*),⁵ and – according to Satow – about the same time before the term in this sense came into use.⁶ To the best of my knowledge no subsequent scholarship has given the diplomatic body more than the summary treatment given to it by Pecquet.

There is no obvious reason to doubt that Mattingly is right to assign the greatest importance to Rome in any account of the origins of the diplomatic corps. This is not least because, as he adds, this city was also 'the chief centre for the diffusion of Italian practice to the rest of Europe'.⁷ However, any account of the origins, or at any rate the early evolution and strengthening, of the diplomatic corps, would probably be remiss if it did not also attach importance to diplomatic life in another great city: Constantinople, after 1453 the capital of the Ottoman Empire. It would be surprising if our evidence for this was not as rich as that for Rome, and a great deal of information can be gleaned about it from one source that is now readily accessible. This is the collection of despatches of Sir Thomas Roe, formerly English ambassador to the Great Moghul, close confidante of Elizabeth Stuart (eldest daughter of James I, and Queen of Bohemia), and from 1621 until 1628 English ambassador at Constantinople.⁸ It is chiefly on this collection that I shall draw in order to explore the evidence for corporate activity among the diplomats in

5 Antoine Pecquet, *Discours sur L'Art de Négocier* (Nyon: Paris, 1737), p. 134. Attention was drawn to it by Maurice Keens-Soper in his essay on 'Diplomatic theory in the *ancien régime*' in H. M. A. Keens-Soper and Karl W. Schweizer (eds), *François de Callières. The Art of Diplomacy* (Leicester UP: Leicester, 1983), pp. 38-9. Lengthy extracts from Pecquet's work, including the short passage in which he deals with the diplomatic corps, appear for the first time in English translation in my forthcoming book, *Diplomatic Classics: Selected texts from Commynes to Vattel* (Palgrave).

6 Citing the historian Ranke (indirectly), Satow says that 'This use of the expression first arose in Vienna about the middle of the eighteenth century', Sir Ernest Satow, *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice*, vol. I, second and revised edition (Longmans, Green: London, 1922), p. 3. This is a bit unfair on Pecquet, whose phrase was '*le corps des Ministre Etranger dans un País*' – not far off '*le corps diplomatique*', and not in Vienna.

7 Mattingly (1965), p. 100.

8 *The Negotiations of Sir Thomas Roe in His Embassy to the Ottoman Porte, from the Year 1621 to 1628*. First published by the Society for the Encouragement of Learning in London in 1740 at the instigation of the novelist, Samuel Richardson, this collection runs to 838 pages and has recently been made available in a facsimile edition from UMI Books on Demand. On Roe himself, see Michael Strachan's excellent *Sir Thomas Roe, 1581-1644* (Michael Russell: Salisbury, 1989), which has two chapters on his Turkish embassy. NB. I have modernized the spelling of all quotations from *The Negotiations*.

Constantinople at this time and suggest the main reasons for that which is observable. In the process, it will be possible to test modestly the general strength of the lines of inquiry indicated by Mattingly.

Constantinople: 'A concourse of all nations'

'No other capital', observes Philip Mansel about Constantinople, 'welcomed so many embassies.... The Ottoman Empire was at once a European, Middle Eastern, African, Black Sea, Mediterranean and Indian Ocean power. It had more neighbours – more matters for dispute or negotiation – than any other state.'⁹ And the sultans welcomed ambassadors as guests, permanent as well as extraordinary, because they flattered their power and invariably came bearing rich gifts. They were also indispensable sources of intelligence as well as of great value to the negotiations of the sultans because, believing that they represented the shadow of God on earth, until 1793 they were unwilling to stoop to establishing abroad any permanent embassies of their own.¹⁰ As with Rome, Constantinople also required – and attracted – able and resilient men. In addition to questions of high politics with which to deal, there were trading colonies to protect, Christians to rescue from the galleys, and 'marbles' to buy or steal for grateful aristocratic patrons at home. There was also a great deal of money to be made on the side for those with the necessary energy and acumen. 'Here are many ambassadors, all experienced and tried in other parts, before they arrive at this trust', wrote Sir Thomas Roe in 1624. 'Here is a concourse of all nations, great and many varieties, important to Christendom.'¹¹

For the Ottomans, the 1620s was a decade marked in the west by the Thirty Years' War, in relationship to which their attitude was of great interest to all of the major players. In the east it was marked by the resumption in 1623 of fighting in their endemic conflict with the Persians. Against this background, numerous special ambassadors came to Constantinople, often

9 P. Mansel, *Constantinople: City of the World's Desire, 1453-1924* (John Murray: London, 1995), p. 189.

10 See my 'Diplomatic integration with Europe before Selim III', in A. Nuri Yurdusev (ed.), *Ottoman Diplomacy: Conventional or unconventional?* (Palgrave-Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2004), pp. 114-30.

11 Roe (1740), p. 320. Mansel (1995) also notes that Constantinople attracted diplomats of high calibre, p. 199.

with vast retinues,¹² and if their purpose was to conclude a peace with the sultan they were sometimes detained for months as hostages. Among the extraordinary embassies to arrive were ones from Poland, Austria, Muscovy, Venice, Transylvania, Ragusa, the Crimean Tartars – and even from Persia itself. There was also a constant stream of messengers, ‘little ambassadors’ (or ‘nuncios’) usually sent to prepare the way for a ‘great ambassador’, and ecclesiastics of various hues on essentially diplomatic errands. However, the diplomatic community in Constantinople was naturally rooted in its most stable element, that is to say, in those diplomats who were **resident** in the city.

There was, to begin with, a number of resident ‘agents’. The Polish government – with which the Ottomans had been at war in 1620-1 and at the end of Roe’s mission still maintained only ‘an infirm peace’¹³ – had an agent in Constantinople.¹⁴ So, too, did Prince Bethlen Gabor, the Sultan’s protestant vassal who ruled Transylvania, whom the English ambassador was under instructions to stir up against Austria. An Austrian agent was also established in 1622: ‘he yet has visited no man’, Roe wrote to Secretary Calvert in London, ‘therefore I know no more of him, but that he shall reside’.¹⁵ And in 1625 an Italian who had formerly worked in a minor capacity in the diplomatic service of the sultan himself was sent by Spain ‘to live a spy, under the resident of the emperor’.¹⁶ However, agents were the lowest form of early modern diplomatic life and really had no degree of ‘representative character’ at all – though their tasks were important.¹⁷ Clearly, they gathered

12 The size of these retinues was regularly reported by Roe. Polish embassies were astonishingly large, Roe estimating that the ‘train’ of Prince Krzysztof Zbaraski, which arrived in the city in 1622, consisted of ‘at least 1200, whereof many lords, and men of quality’, Roe (1740), p. 115. On the resentment that this created in Constantinople, where Ottoman custom was that such ‘guests’ should be accommodated at the sultan’s expense, see D. Kolodziejczyk, ‘Semiotics of behavior in early modern diplomacy: Polish embassies in Istanbul and Bahçesaray’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, vol. 7, no. 3-4, Nov. 2003, pp. 255-6.

13 Roe (1740), p. 772.

14 From some time around the end of 1622 the Polish dragoman had also lived in Roe’s own house, perhaps because the agent had by this time gone home (Roe is not clear on this), Roe (1740), p. 772.

15 Roe (1740), p. 91.

16 Roe (1740), p. 422.

17 At a point in 1624 when he was particularly exasperated by what he took to be the duplicity of the Transylvanian agent (‘who’, he noted, ‘keeps intelligence with the emperors resident’), Roe remarked that the ambassadors had ‘resolved no more to traficque with inferiors’, Roe (1740), p. 356.

intelligence, prepared the way for visits by extraordinary embassies from home, and had limited dealings with Ottoman officials and other diplomats in the city. By virtue of their lowly status, however, agents appear not to have been able to attend meetings of the resident ambassadors and were therefore no more than satellites – ‘inferiors’, as Roe gently put it¹⁸ – orbiting around, rather than being full members of, the diplomatic corps. This consisted – at least as a deliberative body – exclusively of the resident **ambassadors** themselves, who were usually referred to by Roe as ‘ledgers’.¹⁹

The members of the Constantinople diplomatic corps

There had been a Venetian representative – the ‘baillie’ – resident in Constantinople during the reign of the Byzantine emperors, and this post was only temporarily vacated by the fall of the city to the Ottomans in 1453. The bailo, as he was known subsequently, was without question a full ambassador – and more.²⁰ But resident ambassadors did not begin to appear in numbers for roughly another century – led by the French in 1536, and not long afterwards followed for an interval by the hated Austrians.²¹ By the time of the arrival of Sir Thomas Roe in 1621, the Austrian resident ambassador had

18 Roe (1740), p. 356.

19 On this early modern terminology, see G. R. Berridge and Alan James, ***A Dictionary of Diplomacy***. 2nd. ed (Palgrave-Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2003).

20 On the bailo, see H. F. Brown, ***Studies in the History of Venice*** vol. II (John Murray: London, 1907), pp. 1-38; and Donald M. Nicol, ***Byzantium and Venice: A study in diplomatic and cultural relations*** (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988), pp. 289-91, 314, 352.

21 In 1547 the Austrians and the Ottomans agreed a five year truce and Johann Maria Malvezzi was sent as resident ambassador to Constantinople. However, the truce was broken by Ferdinand I in 1551 and accordingly the sultan, Süleyman I, The Magnificent, threw Malvezzi into prison, where he remained until his release two years later. In 1554 he was replaced by the Fleming, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq. However, since it was found impossible to agree the terms of peace until 1562, Busbecq remained under virtual house arrest in a building with barred windows for much the greater part of this period. See ***The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq***, trsl. by E. S. Forster (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1927), pp. 91-9, 132, 137-49, 184, 210. The peace lapsed in 1564 and within a short time Austria and the Ottomans were fighting again. It is stated by Philip Mansel that there were also Polish and Genoese resident ambassadors in Constantinople in the mid-sixteenth century, ‘Art and diplomacy in Ottoman Constantinople’, ***History Today***, Aug. 1996.

long since departed but Dutch and English embassies had joined the French and were also well established. There had been an English embassy in Constantinople since 1583,²² and a Dutch one since 1612, when Cornelis van Haga was appointed by the States General.

Haga, who loved the city, was still there when Roe arrived – and still there when he left. ‘He has bought his house in fee,’ Sir Thomas told one of his correspondents, ‘trimmed it, adorned it, and planted it about, as if he meant to make it his mansion and tombe, and had’, he added presciently, ‘no fear of a removal’. (Haga remained Dutch ambassador at Constantinople until 1639.) Roe had a good working relationship with ‘the states ledger’, though as he saw more of him his reservations appear to have mounted. Writing to Sir Isaac Wake in Venice in 1626, he said of him that ‘He has lived long in Turkey, and is so corrupted with their manners, that he is the shame of ambassadors... and if necessity of business, wherein he has not much authority, did not hold us together, for my part I would not converse with him’.²³

Roe also had good working relations with the Venetian representatives with whom he overlapped, and he gave them more respect. ‘Wise’, ‘discreet’, ‘wary’, were the adjectives that often came to his lips when he mentioned them.²⁴ However, the French ambassador, Philippe de Harlay, Comte de Césy, who had arrived in 1620 and was to remain in Constantinople for the greater part of the period until 1639,²⁵ Roe despised. He was, to the mind of the Englishman, far too stiff-necked on the issue of precedence (see below), impetuous, malicious, and inclined to brand as sour grapes subjects on which he could not secure the lead. He also possessed neither ‘credit nor reputation in court nor city’ for having got himself ruinously in debt.²⁶ That much of this debt was to members of the English colony did not increase his standing in

22 On the establishment of this embassy, which was financed by the Levant Company but carried royal credentials, see S. A. Skilliter, *William Harborne and the Trade with Turkey 1578-1582* (OUP, 1977); S. A. Skilliter, ‘The organization of the first English embassy in Istanbul in 1583’, *Asian Affairs*, 1979, vol. 10; and A. C. Wood, *A History of the Levant Company* (OUP, 1935).

23 Roe (1740), p. 627.

24 Roe (1740), pp. 126, 609, 627, 639.

25 Jean-Michel Casa, *Le Palais de France à Istanbul: Un demi-millénaire d’alliance entre la Turquie et la France* (Yapi Kredi Yayinlari: Istanbul, 1995), p. 109.

26 Roe (1740), pp. 112, 113, 126, 610, 725.

Roe's eyes. In short, Roe told Sir Isaac Wake in 1626, 'he is not worth a good feather'.²⁷

Of course, as with the diplomatic corps in all capitals, that in Constantinople had tensions that went beyond personalities. There was rivalry between the trading colonies of the four states, which was sometimes intense. There were also differences over policy,²⁸ though these were offset to a great extent by their mutual hostility to the Habsburgs.²⁹ The most serious obstacle to the development of a corporate spirit within the diplomatic corps, however, was the problem of precedence.

The problem of precedence

Prior to the resolution of this question at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, arguments over precedence were sparked off by any form of joint diplomatic activity. On the authority of the papal class list of 1504, the French claimed precedence over all of the other ambassadors in Constantinople – and they had previously conceded it.³⁰ However, this was a situation that James I of England proved unwilling to tolerate, and Roe was required to act accordingly. The result, the ambassador informed Calvert in 1622, was that 'In our public business, when we should join, we are all hindered by the matter of precedence between the French and myself.'³¹ It was, moreover, not a problem easily solved. The Comte de Césy complained to Paris of Roe's attitude, and the French ambassador in London raised the issue with the English government. However, in 1623 it was still bedevilling any form of joint activity relative to the Porte. This was true whether, as Roe complained,

27 Roe (1740), p. 627.

28 A particular difficulty between the English and the French was the work of the Capuchins in Constantinople, who were supported by Richelieu's *éminence grise* Father Joseph. Roe was charged with securing their expulsion, which – for a brief period at the end of his time in the city – he eventually achieved.

29 This led the ambassadors to spend a great deal of time concerting their actions towards Bethlen Gabor, in order that he should remain a thorn in the Emperor's side. They also acted together most strenuously to oppose (in the event successfully) the arrival in Constantinople of a Spanish ambassador – the influence of whose gold at the Porte was feared more than his arguments.

30 In 1581 the Ottomans themselves had also confirmed it when the French capitulations were renewed, Skilliter (1977), p. 170. See also Mansel (1995), pp. 191-2.

31 Roe (1740), p. 59.

this was 'going together [to protest some matter with the Ottoman officials], or by signing some writing, in both which he [the French ambassador] will have a superiority; but can get none of me'.³² Roe appealed to London for a high-level resolution of this issue and it was taken up by the English ambassador in France – but to no avail.³³

The quarrel over precedence between the English and the French remained a serious handicap to the strengthening of the diplomatic corps in Constantinople during Roe's time. The English ambassador's approach was to avoid as much as possible those occasions where it might become an issue, for example at the welcoming of a new ambassador to the city, and he began to go to some lengths to avoid meeting the Comte de Césy at all.³⁴ His other tactic was to urge repeatedly that any protests made by the ambassadors to the Porte – whether in person or writing – should be made separately, rather than jointly. The French ambassador, however, would have none of this, and it was not until 1624 that a partial resolution of the problem was achieved, not by London and Paris but by the ambassadors themselves.

In 1624 the Dutch and Venetian ambassadors made a determined effort to mediate a solution between their French and English colleagues, and put forward, said Roe, 'many propositions'. Despite this, it still proved impossible to find any agreement on how to constitute a joint delegation to the sultan. Nevertheless, forced by the urgency of a 'general grievance' to make *some* form of joint protest, a way was finally hit upon by which this could be done in writing, and a 'remonstrance' was drawn up. This finessed the problem of precedence by two means. First, the document referred for its authority to 'the 4 resident Christian ambassadors, without mention of any one in particular'. In other words, neither the names of the ambassadors nor those of their masters were mentioned in the text, thereby avoiding the issue of the order in which they should be presented. Secondly, only a relatively small space was left for the ambassadors' signatures and seals between the last line of the text and the bottom of the page. This made it impossible for the signatures (with their accompanying seals) to be inscribed in columns. Moreover, Roe was given first choice of where in this space to place his signature.

But matters were still not straightforward! This was because the left-hand side 'was the chiefest according to the Christian, and the right according to

32 Roe (1740), pp. 148, 188.

33 Calvert to Roe, 18 May 1624, Roe (1740), p. 244.

34 Roe (1740), pp. 148-9, 187.

the Turkish, by reason of the difference in writing'. This being the case, Roe calculated that if he signed on one side, the French ambassador would sign on the other – and claim, depending on Roe's choice, either by appeal to Christian or Turkish style, to have stolen a precedence. Accordingly, on receipt of the document from the Venetian dragoman, the English ambassador 'took a compass, and exactly in the middle signed and sealed it according to form'. What happened next he does not tell us. Presumably two signatures were added to one side of his own, and the remaining one on the other. Certainly the document was submitted to the sultan.

Churlishly dismissing the French ambassador's claim that he had agreed to this procedure out of concern for the 'general good', Roe nevertheless admitted that he did not understand his motive. It seems not to have occurred to him that de Césy would have had no difficulty in persuading the Dutch and Venetian ambassadors to give *him* (the French ambassador) the *choice* of sides on which to sign after Roe had claimed the middle. Thereby he would have had little difficulty – should the need have arisen – in persuading his all-seeing master in Paris, Cardinal Richelieu, that he had preserved French precedence over the English. It would be extremely interesting to know if this document still exists.

In any event, Roe had agreed to a joint, written protest, and de Césy had conceded that it should be made in a manner which at least enabled Roe to claim that it signified an equality of status between the ambassadors. 'Since this time more courtesies have passed between us,' reported the English ambassador, somewhat complacently, 'and I find him very tractable and affable' – though he still had no money to pay his debts to the English merchants.³⁵

This finesse over the form of joint, written protests certainly helped to prevent the quarrel over precedence from stifling the development of the diplomatic corps in Constantinople at this point, though to what extent – if at all – it was subsequently employed in Roe's period is not clear from his despatches.³⁶ However, the chief reason why the diplomatic corps held together and probably strengthened its formal bonds despite the quarrel over

35 Roe (1740), pp. 269-70.

36 In 1627, though on a matter in which Roe felt it imprudent for the ambassadors to take a strong line with the Porte, he once more fell out with the French ambassador. On this occasion, as he reported, 'the Dutch, his instrument, brought me the petition ready made, and under written by him, in the highest place, offering it to me for subscription ... I roundly took this occasion to leave them', he added, Roe (1740), p. 639.

precedence was that the advantages of unity were particularly compelling at this time. What were they?

The forces for unity

Fear

The four ambassadors had numerous meetings although, it seems, on an irregular basis. It has already been noted that the diplomatic body was small in number – just four ambassadors – and it is reasonable to assume that this made it easier to organize and easier to obtain decisions. Much more importantly, though, there was in Constantinople a particularly urgent need on the part of the ambassadors to stand together in self-defence.

When Roe arrived in Constantinople, where he was initially ignored and denied the ‘usual courtesies’ by the Porte, he found the diplomatic corps demoralized.³⁷ Writing to Secretary Calvert in London in 1621, he said:

I have found here little respect to the quality of a christian prince's ambassador: I have had some speech thereof with those that reside here, and I find that the interest of the Venetian, by his neighbourhood, to bear anything, and the errors that the French have fallen into, and the sufferance of my predecessors, have by little and little brought them into contempt. I have undertaken to begin a reformation; and because I would not run alone, and be left single, I have required articles of all the rest to stand with me, which they have promised.³⁸

But the ambassadors had more to worry about – and more to dispose them to close ranks – than discourtesies. For all their differences, they remained, after all, the representatives of Christian princes in a Muslim world, and even in quiet times hostility was never far from the surface. ‘[W]e lived among enemies, where questions [squabbles] ought to be avoided’, Roe reported himself saying to the French ambassador following a tussle over precedence in 1622.³⁹ However, the first years of Roe's time in Constantinople were far from

37 Mansel (1995) notes that Ottoman arrogance towards ambassadors was at its height in the seventeenth century: ‘Suleyman and Selim II had talked to ambassadors. After 1600 the Sultan hardly looked at them’, p. 193.

38 Roe (1740), p. 18.

39 Roe (1740), p. 113.

quiet. In fact, a janissary revolt, a sultan assassinated, and a feeble-minded successor, plunged the city into anarchy and led to a major Anatolian rebellion. Until Mustafa I was deposed in favour of Murat IV in September 1623, the Ottoman Empire seemed on the verge of disintegration – and things did not get better overnight. In June 1622, Roe told Lord Doncaster that in Constantinople ‘barbarism is philosophy, and mutiny justice’ adding that ‘though they [the janissaries] have offered us no injury, yet, when madness and fury rages, who is safe?’⁴⁰ And in the following year he voiced the conclusion that he had no doubt drawn much earlier: ‘In these disordered times, when all nations suffer many injuries and oppressions, we have no refuge but to join our selves, which is a little bulwark’.⁴¹

In any case, Constantinople was also a capital in which diplomatic immunity as it was beginning to evolve in Europe was not even in principle respected. It is certainly true that the ambassadors were regarded as leaders of resident ‘nations’ enjoying certain privileges from the hand of the sultan (‘capitulations’); these included protection (*aman*), which in practice was provided by *cavasses* and janissary guards.⁴² It is also true that they were the representatives of overseas states, and that their treatment could dispose their masters, by turns, to be either helpful or not to the policy of the sultan’s government, generous or penny-pinching in lining the pockets of his slaves. As a result, the ambassadors were by no means abused to the degree that has sometimes been suggested. Nevertheless, the inviolability of their persons and their houses endured only so long as their princes remained in friendship with the sultan. In effect, they were all hostages, and, as such, could be imprisoned indefinitely if this friendship should fail – as French and Imperial ambassadors had found to their cost quite recently.⁴³ Latent Muslim hostility, anarchy on the streets at certain periods, and their hostage status, all gave the ambassadors an interest in looking out for each other.

Defence of the capitulations

Another interest shared by the members of the diplomatic corps, and one that at this time was unique to Constantinople, was respect by the Ottoman

40 Roe (1740), pp. 54-5.

41 Roe (1740), p. 148.

42 Stanford J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 1 (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1976), pp. 163-4.

43 Mansel (1995), pp. 192-3.

authorities of the terms of their capitulations. This was often particularly difficult to obtain in remote parts of the Empire but in disturbed times could be equally so in the capital itself – as during Roe's period. Of course, the ambassadors were not sorry to see their 'colleagues' obtain worse terms than themselves when these agreements were first negotiated, and subsequently re-negotiated. But if an Ottoman official was allowed to get away with ignoring the terms of one state's capitulations a dangerous precedent would be established. Indeed, concern over this question was much in the minds of all of the ambassadors during Roe's period and was a major factor pulling them together.

It was only shortly after Roe arrived in Constantinople that the French ambassador himself employed the cry of 'common interest' in order to secure help from his diplomatic colleagues to secure observation of his capitulations. The French had a grievance against the governor of Cairo and had already secured the support of the Dutch and Venetian ambassadors. In the event, Roe himself refused to add his own signature to the joint written protest produced by the Comte de Césy because the French ambassador insisted that his own name should go first. Excusing himself by claiming that the English had no commerce at Cairo, and 'unwilling any way', Roe reports, 'to break that unity which I myself had contracted', the English ambassador told his colleagues that he would 'not forsake them in any general cause'. As a result, he urged that they each make separate protests and thereby avoid the issue of precedence. How this was finally resolved Roe does not make clear but he claims to have soothed the French ambassador – who had threatened to reply in kind if in future the boot was on the other foot – with emollient words and by helping him out in some other matters.⁴⁴

Soothing the Frenchman was important because it was not long before Roe did indeed need his support. In the middle of 1622 a tax which Roe believed to be inconsistent with the English capitulations was suddenly imposed on silk being shipped to Turkey in English vessels. He appealed for redress to the grand vizier but in vain. In a dispatch to Calvert that still palpably steams with indignation, Roe recounts his angry exchange with the grand vizier and how subsequently he enlisted the other ambassadors in his support, though not without 'much ado' and threatening to shame them by standing alone:

44 Roe (1740), pp. 112-13.

the vizier took part against us, the veriest villain that ever lived; and used me with great contempt, threatened to hang my secretary, and drogemen [interpreters], if they spoke in my cause; whereupon I threw him my capitulations... and unloaded my silk, resolved to stand it out. To this end, I procured all the ambassadors here to join; and we were on our way, with full resolution to go to court, and to procure his head, or to ask leave to remove our countrymen, and their estates, which are now in great danger.

Fortunately, Roe was able to report that 'God took my quarrel in hand'. On the way to the palace, the ambassadors heard that the villainous grand vizier had also fallen foul of the janissaries, who were a far more serious threat than the diplomats to continuing intimacy between his head and his shoulders. 'He is fled,' reported Roe with obvious satisfaction, 'and order given to kill him where he is first found'.⁴⁵ The English ambassador could have given many similar examples, though by late in 1623 he is found simply saying that 'we poor strangers suffer all manner of injuries, and all oppressions; no capitulations observed; double and new customs exacted to get money'.⁴⁶

Shared services

The diplomatic corps in Constantinople was not only a society for mutual defence against the depredations of Ottoman officials – high and low. It was also one based on the obvious advantage of sharing important services. The two most important of these were the acquisition and distribution of information, and messenger services.

It has frequently been pointed out that the diplomatic corps in all cities was always of great value to its members for the trading of information, on both local and international events. However, this was especially true of Constantinople because of its relative remoteness, particularly from the north European states, among them England. It was not long after his arrival that Roe was complaining to London of the absence of letters from England and his dependence on the other ambassadors for news of outside affairs, even – most humiliating of all – of events at home.⁴⁷ Throughout his time in the Ottoman Empire he had very few letters from the secretary of state in London and complained about this with increasing stridency. It is true that he began

45 Roe (1740), pp. 61-2.

46 Roe (1740), p. 188.

47 Roe (1740), p. 22.

to acquire information from the correspondence that he nurtured with English diplomatic colleagues elsewhere, especially in The Hague, Venice, and Savoy, and also had letters from other important persons in England itself, including the Archbishop of Canterbury.⁴⁸ The fact remains, however, that Roe was generally short of information – only ‘fed with scraps and stale ends’⁴⁹ – and was correspondingly reliant on his colleagues. This was particularly evident at one difficult juncture in 1626, when he was confronted by an extraordinary ambassador from Bethlen Gabor. This ambassador claimed that a conference at The Hague had decided that he, Sir Thomas, must assist Gabor to procure action by the pasha of Buda against the Emperor and ‘nourish the Tartars against the king of Poland’. In the absence of any instruction on this point from London, the English ambassador had to rely on an assurance from the Venetian bailo that this was indeed true. This permitted Roe to advance cautiously on these fronts,⁵⁰ and shortly afterwards he received a letter from the secretary of state confirming that the king’s intentions for him had been correctly represented.⁵¹ In 1627 we find Roe still dwelling on his dependence on the Venetian: ‘There are come two ordinaries [regular postal deliveries] from Venice, without any letters from England, so that I borrow of the bailo (a worthy man) all I know of my own country.’⁵²

The other ambassadors may not have been quite as dependent on their colleagues for information on external events as was Roe but it would be surprising – in fact, astonishing – if they did not attach considerable importance to them as sources. Of course, Roe also pooled with them – especially the Dutch and Venetian ambassadors – intelligence about Ottoman affairs, which he needed not only to fulfil his instructions from London but also to use as bait to elicit replies from his English diplomatic colleagues at other postings.

It was, however, little use obtaining local intelligence if it could not be got out, and there was really no point in being in Constantinople at all in the absence of communications with the outside world that were tolerably rapid, predictable, and secure. At this period none of these things was easy to

48 Many of these are reproduced in Roe (1740).

49 Roe (1740), p. 355.

50 Roe (1740), pp. 522-3. ‘First,’ reported Roe, ‘he showed me a letter from the Senate, signifying to him, that his majesty had told their ambassador in England, that he had taken to consideration the offers of Gabor, and given me order to assist and serve him, especially mentioning the countenance of the pasha of Buda’.

51 Roe (1740), p. 528.

52 Roe (1740), p. 663.

achieve for the ambassadors in this most remote of postings, especially for those from northern Europe – and especially in winter.⁵³ Sometimes their dispatches did not even get out of Constantinople: ‘our letters of May’, Roe observed drolly to Sir Dudley Carleton in 1623, ‘were intercepted and sold in the city to wrap pepper’.⁵⁴ What all of this meant at this time, when national messenger services were still in general poorly developed,⁵⁵ was great reliance on the Venetian postal service, as Roe soon found out.

Venice was closer to Constantinople than the capitals of the other states with resident ambassadors in the city, and had important relations with it going back centuries earlier than any of them. Moreover, though the republic itself was by this time well past the peak of its prestige, it had a diplomatic service that was still regarded as the model for all Europe. In the second half of the sixteenth century the bailo was the unquestioned informal *doyen* of the nascent diplomatic corps.⁵⁶ It is hardly surprising, then, that Venice had the best communications with Constantinople and that the other ambassadors – especially the Dutch and the English – should have relied on them. In fact, the bailo acted as ‘postmaster for the whole diplomatic body’.⁵⁷

The ordinary post left twice a month for Venice, and English mail appears to have been forwarded from there by the English ambassador. English (and other European) letters returning were gathered in Venice and forwarded to the bailo, who then distributed them through the city. However, the bailo also despatched his own embassy bags in the intervening periods, and – ‘as a favour’ – would permit the despatches of other embassies to be carried in them.⁵⁸

Roe is eloquent on his need for the Venetian post, and how this required him to cultivate the bailo. Complaining in one of his earliest letters of the

53 On diplomatic communications in this period generally, see John B. Allen, *Post and Courier Service in the Diplomacy of Early Modern Europe* (Nijhoff: The Hague, 1972).

54 Roe (1740), p. 157.

55 The King’s Messenger service of the English government did not begin to provide a proper service until it was reorganized in 1772; see M. A. Thomson, *The Secretaries of State, 1681-1782* (Cass: London, 1968), p. 142; and V. Wheeler-Holohan, *The History of the King’s Messengers* (Grayson: London, 1935), chs. 3-5.

56 Most remarkably, his law court, established under the terms of a treaty with the sultan in 1454 in order to exercise civil jurisdiction (subsequently criminal as well) over the Venetian community in the city, was the civil court for *all* foreigners. In the 1590s, the English ambassador, Edward Barton, himself submitted to the jurisdiction of the bailo, Brown (1907), pp. 4-5.

57 Brown (1907), p. 32; see also Allen (1972), pp. 26, 38, 66, 86.

58 Brown (1907), p. 32.

absence of incoming mail to Sir Henry Wotton in Venice, and asking him to investigate, Roe added:

The Dutch ambassador has so good a correspondence [relationship] with the Venetian, that he is ever full [of letters], and we starve. I have at some distance spoken to the bailo, and done whatsoever becomes me, to maintain a good quarter with him, and have offered myself in all his public occasions, wherein I knew my master's credit can much avail him, and he has returned all outward courtesies; but this I fear, perhaps, because we too easily commit ourselves to a trust; for it is strange, and out of course, that we must receive all our letters at the courtesy of another state.⁵⁹

Roe's attempts to ingratiate himself with the bailo appear to have paid off because their relations remained smooth throughout his time in Constantinople and his correspondence continued to be handled by the Venetian post. However, it is a mark of the absence of any serious alternative to it that he continued to use it despite his belief – strongly shared in London – that the Venetians not only detained his post when it suited their purposes but also regularly opened it.⁶⁰

A shared neighbourhood

It is quite clear from his despatches and private letters that Roe met his fellow ambassadors 'in council' quite often. However, he never complains of any practical difficulty in attending these meetings – and he certainly would if he had had cause. This is no doubt because in the Turkish capital, as in the capitals of other states, the diplomats from states with which peace was firmly established all tended to live in the same quarter. In this case it was the fashionable district known as Pera, on the hill above Galata on the northern

59 Roe (1740), p. 20.

60 This was admitted by the Venetian ambassador in London, who pleaded excessive zeal on the part of underlings in the post office, Roe (1740), pp. 113, 160-1, 178. Perhaps because of English protests these abuses diminished. Certainly, Roe seemed happy with the Venetian post in the later years of his period in Constantinople. For example, in 1627, in commenting on the mystery of delayed letters from Sir Isaac Wake in Venice, Roe remarked that he had 'no cause to mistrust the bailo, whose friendship is my only comfort here', Roe (1740), p. 695.

side of the Golden Horn.⁶¹ The concentration of diplomats in Pera seems to have been a result of choice rather than – as for example in the case of the legation quarter in Peking in the nineteenth century – compulsion. It was, at least to begin with, healthier and less congested than Constantinople, sufficiently separate from the heart of the city to make its European, Christian atmosphere tolerable to its rulers – and yet close enough to them for the ready conduct of business. But, no doubt by underlining their common culture as well as by virtue of physical proximity, the concentration of diplomats in Pera (and the families of many of their dragomans) also encouraged co-operation between the ambassadors.

Collective treatment by Porte

It will be recalled that Mattingly is of the view that collective treatment by the pope of the Rome diplomatic corps was probably the main factor in encouraging the development of its corporate identity. Can a similar process be observed in Constantinople?

There is little evidence in Roe's *Negotiations* that the Porte treated the diplomatic corps as a collective body, and none that it was treated in this way on any ceremonial occasions. This is not surprising, for two reasons. First of all, the ambassadors were regarded by the Ottomans chiefly as the protectors of the members of their 'nations' who were resident throughout their empire, analogous to the *millets* (semi-autonomous religious communities) established by Mehmet II after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453.⁶² Since there were in fact religious differences between them, as well as legendary commercial rivalries, it is not surprising that the Ottomans tended to think of

61 During the Byzantine period, the foreign trading communities had lived in Constantinople 'proper' but in the middle of the thirteenth century the Genoese, who were no longer welcome there, accepted Galata as their new home. This was the beginning of the development of this district as the 'Franks quarter', Nicol (1992), p. 190. On Pera and its diplomats in the early seventeenth century generally, see D. Goffman, *Britons in the Ottoman Empire, 1642-1660* (University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, 1998), pp. 34-5; Mansel (1995), p. 194 (where it is noted that 'At first diplomats lived in a special han in Constantinople itself'); and Stanley Mayes, *An Organ for the Sultan* (Putnam: London, 1956), p. 157.

62 See Shaw (1976), pp. 58-9; Niels Steensgaard, 'Consuls and nations in the Levant from 1570 to 1650', *The Scandinavian Economic History Review*, vol. XV nos. 1 & 2, 1967; and H. Inalcik, 'Imtiyazat', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. III (Brill, Leiden; Luzac, London: 1971), pp. 1183-4.

the ambassador's reference group as his 'nation' rather than his professional 'colleagues'. Secondly, it was hardly in the interest of the Ottomans to treat the diplomats – all Christian 'Franks' – as a collective body and thereby encourage their solidarity; in fact, quite the contrary. With internal strife to contend with as well as a powerful enemy in the east (Persia), the last thing that the Porte wanted was to do anything to encourage the unity of Christendom.⁶³ Having said this, there is intriguing evidence in Roe's correspondence that on at least one occasion the Ottomans did just this.

Following the accession of Murat in September 1623, a great effort was made by his new government to restore order and financial health to the empire. Since its coffers were empty and since the janissaries 'sharply demanded' their pay, 'with threats of innovation', raising as much money as quickly as possible was the Porte's top priority. Among other methods, it sought to do this, wrote Roe in September 1623, by extorting contributions from 'every other order of men and officers, that are not of the sword. The vizier', he continued, 'sent solemnly to the four resident ambassadors to borrow 30000 chequins, as the friends and allies of this porte, to whom in confidence they dare open their secrets.' Roe added that there were experienced officials who thought this dishonourable and unlikely to be successful – and, indeed, the ambassadors, pleading poverty themselves, refused.⁶⁴ The point is though that the Porte treated the diplomatic corps as an *order* of men, and no doubt obliged this order to consult together so that it might concert *its* response.

Summary, and suggestions for future research

In sum, there was a small diplomatic body in Constantinople in the 1620s that deserved the name. Its members – the Venetians, French, English, and Dutch – were thrown together by common interests in resisting insult and violence, defending the capitulations, exchanging information, and preserving their communications with the outside world. Joint deliberations were also

63 Of course, the disunity of Christendom in the face of the Ottoman threat was widely lamented in the west. Roe himself put the point with his usual felicity when he told Doncaster, in 1622, that, with its janissaries corrupt and disobedient and its galleys rotten and decayed, 'this mighty monarchy [the Ottoman sultanate] has no other walls to defend it, but the uncivil dissensions of christian princes', Roe (1740), p. 54.

64 Roe (1740), p. 180.

made easy by the fact that they lived in relatively close proximity to each other, in Pera. Less important, though perhaps not entirely insignificant, on at least one occasion an attempt was made by the Porte to *tax* them as a collective body. It was for these reasons that, though the diplomatic corps was seriously threatened by a bitter argument over precedence between the English and French ambassadors, it eventually found a limited way out of this by its own exertions – after London-Paris diplomacy had failed.

Of course, I have only scratched the surface of this subject. I have relied on only one source, a glaring weakness for which I would certainly fail a student dissertation. (I attempt, feebly, to avoid an analogous fate by calling this paper ‘Notes on...’.) I have also started the investigation at a year that is too advanced, that is, 1621, when 1536, the date of the arrival of the French ambassador, would have been more appropriate. (Though on the evidence of Busbecq’s letters, the Frenchman had hardly any contact at all with him at least, and probably less with his predecessor, Malvezzi. There is barely a whiff of any ‘diplomatic body’ in these letters).⁶⁵

A proper study of this subject would require further investigation of the English sources before Roe, not to mention the original copies of Roe’s papers, fully listed in the ‘Bibliographical Note’ to Michael Strachan’s biography.⁶⁶ Obviously, too, it would require study of the French, Venetian, Dutch, Austrian,⁶⁷ and Ottoman archives – and quite possibly of the Polish archives as well. This would make an excellent subject for a small workshop. A lot of the evidence is probably already available in secondary sources, albeit with a different focus.⁶⁸ One could also envisage a much larger project on the origins of the diplomatic corps for which the Rockefeller Foundation’s Study and Conference Center at Bellagio might be persuaded to provide a setting. This would require individual contributions on all of the major diplomatic centres in Europe in the early modern period, together with comparative analysis. Of such stuff are academic dreams made.

65 Busbecq (1927).

66 Strachan (1989).

67 No doubt helpful here would be Karl Nehring (ed), *Austro-Turcica, 1541-1552: Diplomatische Akten des habsburgischen Gesandtschaftsverkehrs mit der Hohen Pforte, im Zeitalter Süleymans des Prächtigen* (Oldenbourg: Munich, 1995).

68 I note from the web, for example, that in November 2002 Bulent Ari of Bilkent and Cankaya Universities in Turkey gave a paper at Harvard’s Middle East Studies Center on ‘Early Ottoman-Dutch Relations and the First Dutch Ambassador in Istanbul: Cornelis Haga’.