



## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND DIPLOMACY IN THE ANCIENT ROMAN EMPIRE

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### ABSTRACT

*This article tries to establish that diplomacy had an important place in the management of the Romans' relations firstly with other rival communities in Italy and then with foreign peoples as they established an empire. The Romans developed a distinctive procedure of diplomacy, which embodied principles that were to be important in the evolution of diplomatic method, notably respect for treaties, good faith, equivalence, personal contact, formal meetings and protocol. However, the Romans often used offensive diplomacy, in that the threat of their powerful army enabled them to get what they wanted without fighting.*

Unfortunately, our primary sources for Roman international relations and diplomacy are fragmentary and erratic. No treatise dedicated to the subject has survived, and the main historical sources are incomplete retrospective and focused on other matters. A precious few relevant inscription also survives.

Rome inherited what the Greeks devised and adapted it to the task of imperial administration. As Rome expanded, it often negotiated with representatives of conquered areas, to which it granted partial self-government by way of a treaty. Treaties were made with other states under Greek international law. During the Roman Republic the Senate conducted foreign policy, through a department for foreign affairs was established. Later, under the Empire, the

emperor was the ultimate decision maker in foreign affairs. Envoys were received with ceremony and magnificence, and they and their aides were granted immunity.

A Fetial (Latin plural *fetiales*) was a type of priest in Ancient Rome. They formed a collegium. Fetial was a member of priestly board in Ancient Rome responsible for overseeing diplomatic negotiations.

The duties of the *fetials* included:

- advising the senate on foreign affairs and international treaties;
- making formal proclamations of peace and of war;
- confirming treaties

Carrying out the function of heralds and ambassadors (Pater Patratus)

According to Book I of Livy's history of Rome, after Rome had been injured by another state, four *fetials* were sent out to



seek redress. One member, the *verbenarius*, carried herbs gathered from the Arx on the Capitoline Hill. Another member, called *C*, served as the group's representative. Upon reaching the border of the offending state, *the pater patratus* first announced his mission and addressed a prayer to Jupiter in which he affirmed the justness of his errand. Crossing the border, he repeated the same from several times. If, after 30 days (some sources give 33), no satisfaction was given, *the pater patratus* harshly denounced the offending state and returned to Rome, where he reported to the Senate. If Rome decided to wage war, the *pater patratus* returned to the border, pronounced a declaration of war and hurled across the boundary either a regular spear or a special stake sharpened and hardened in the fire. This ritual was supposed to keep Rome from waging an unjust or aggressive war. If, however, the hostile country was far away, the spear soon came to be cast upon a piece of land in front of the Temple of Bellona in Rome; by legal fiction, that land was treated as belonging to the enemy. Thus, the ritual limitations were overcome by such legal fictions, and the state entered into any wars that were seen to be its advantage. When treaties were concluded, *the verbenarius* and *the pater patratus* were sent to the other nation; after reading the treaty aloud, they pronounced a curse on Rome should that state be the first to break it. The ceremony was concluded by killing a pig with a flint implement. By the time of the late republic, the institution had faded out, although the emperor Augustus (63 BC-AD 14) revived the group, ceremonially at least and became a member himself in his effort to restore old Roman traditions.

Roman law (*Jus gentium*), which stressed the sanctity of contracts, became the basis of treaties. Later in the Republican era, the laws applied by the Romans to foreigners and to foreign envoys were merged with the Greek concept of natural law, and ideal code applying to all people, to create a "law of nations." The sanctity of treaties and the law of nations were absorbed by the Roman Catholic church and preserved in the centuries after the Western Roman Empire collapsed.

Diplomatic organs in Ancient Rome. Embassies in Rome was called *legations* and ambassador were called *legati, orates, caduceatores*. Embassies in Ancient Rome consists of at least 3 persons (up to 6). Each embassy owned Head of the embassy (*princeps legationis*). After termination of his functions ambassadors made a short report about their functions to the Senate (*legationem referre, renuntiare*).

Embassies in which Rome divided into 2 groups:

- Embassies in which Rome had friendly relations;
- Embassies in which Rome had normal relations.

Roman envoys were sent abroad with written instruction from their government. Sometimes a messenger, or *nuntius*, was sent, usually to towns. For larger responsibilities a *legatio* (embassy) of 10 or 12 *legati* (ambassadors) was organized under a president. The *legati*, who were leading citizens chosen for their skill at oratory, were inviolable.

Rome also created sophisticated archives, which were staffed by trained archivists. Paleographic techniques were developed to decipher and authenticate ancient documents. Other archivists specialized in diplomatic precedents and



procedures, which became formalized. For centuries these achieve-based activities were the major preoccupation of diplomacy in and around the Roman Empire.

The ambassadors reported to the Senate and submitted a report to the Senate. Many terms and expressions from the Roman administration were translated into the languages of the nations. *Memorandum, nota, persona non grata, pacta servanda sunt* so on.

Throughout the year, dozens of Roman embassies roamed neighboring countries and territories, searching for alliances for new wars, trying to limit rivals or turn them against each other. Attempts were made to intimidate them and break the spirits of future victims of the Roman colony. "Divide et impere" was the main motto of the Roman strategy.

The Romans spared no expense and time for diplomatic activity. They have developed detailed methods of meeting foreign delegations, conducting negotiations, conducting diplomatic correspondence. The foreign ambassadors were met at the Republican frontier (later on the frontier of the Empire) by a

prestigious Roman military escort and escorted to the capital. The embassy is treated with respect and hospitality, and the head of the embassy has the right to address the senate given.

The reception of the ambassadors of the hostile state was a little different. The ambassadors were stationed on Mars Square, where Roman legionnaires trained daily in front of their homes. In this way, Roman diplomacy tried to put pressure on the negotiating partners, intimidate them, and force them to submit to the powerful Rome.

## CONCLUSION

The experience of Roman history confirmed the hypothesis that diplomacy, like politics in general, was a possible art. During the heyday of Rome, the diplomatic service actively contributed to its success. However, as the negative factors in the internal and external affairs of the empire increased, diplomacy did not prevent the decline of Rome, even though it delayed it for decades. Rome, torn apart by internal strife, surrendered in 476 under the onslaught of warlike barbarians.

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