

Women and Diplomacy in a Historical Perspective: From Aristocratic “Salons” to Official Appointments.

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“The first civilization of people started from women, and women, generally, take an important role in every decay or rebirth [...] Man's domestication, sexually uncouth, is due to women. In one of them, there is strength and impetus. On the other, there is the principle of calm, peace, and fear of the gods and the divine.”¹

1. Introduction

For a long time, diplomacy, according to the definition of the French diplomat Maurice Paléologue, was “a masculine realm of conquest and fame”.² This definition gives us a clear perspective on how diplomacy and, generally, international affairs have lengthily been conceived as a sector where men dominated, and women had a secondary role. Indeed, before the Renaissance, many scholars considered it the “birthplace” of modern diplomacy.³ Even after the Congress of Wien – which introduced the middle class in the international affairs sector – the diplomats usually were men from the aristocracy, often accompanied in ancillary roles by their wives or sisters. For them, especially for ambassadors' wives, the title of “ambassadress” was introduced in the XVI century.⁴ Nevertheless, as this essay demonstrates, the role of these women, even if secondary, was not

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¹ *Bachofen, J. J.*, Il matriarcato. I-II, Einaudi, Torino, 1988. According to *Bachofen*, all ancient civilizations of Europe had a matriarchal character in which men were either subordinated to women or equal to them. This matriarchal aspect had a telluric and chthonic character based on religion and on the similarity between the fertility of women and that of the earth; for this reason, the author considered matriarchy as a *ius naturale*.

² *Paléologue, M.*, The romantic diplomat: Talleyrand, Metternich and Chateaubriand, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1926, 16.

³ Women, Diplomacy and International Politics since 1500, *Sluga, G., James, C.* eds., Routledge, London-New York, 2016.

⁴ A specific case of this practice is indicated in *Allen, G.*, The Rise of the Ambassadress: English Ambassadorial Wives and Early Modern Diplomatic Culture, *The Historical Journal*, 62, 3, 2019, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018, 617-638.

marginal. Some of them proved able to gain power from inter-dynastic marriages. Some others acquired an active political role by establishing solid friendships despite distances through regular correspondence, as in the case of the long-lasting correspondence between Queen *Elizabeth I* and *Safiye Sultan* from which important commercial flows originated. However, this was a practice mostly used to reinforce political alliances and in which women were more “objects” than “subjects” of diplomatic affairs.⁵ The centrality these women acquired in political and diplomatic affairs anticipated the “salons” of those noble women, like Madame de Staël, that conditioned political and international affairs of Europe during the XIX century.

Despite these exceptions, that the present essay recollects, women remained in the background even when, after the Congress of Wien (1814), diplomatic affairs left the “private circles” which were exclusive prerogative of the aristocrats, and became a “scientific” field, characterized by reasoned discussions among sovereign states’ representatives,⁶ Also open to a member of the middle class. Indeed, this new situation entailing the creation of a new class of “bourgeois” diplomacy led to “gender expectations” for women to exit from their “salons” and take a direct role which was harshly disappointed. While this new institutionalization of diplomatic affairs reinforced the concepts of sovereignty and nationality, “ambadress presiding over the embassy as an extension of the household, and, simultaneously, as a symbol of the national culture”.⁷ In brief, the bourgeoisie diplomacy “firmed up the masculine identification of the diplomat and state-based politics and meant

⁵ *Pierce, L. P.*, *The Imperial Harem. Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*, Oxford University Press, New York-Oxford, 1993.

⁶ In this period, the concept of the nation as a political unit was affirmed. In this regard, Gentile distinguishes between cultural nations – based on linguistic and cultural unity yet lacking a political will (i.e., Italy since the XIII century) – and political nations – identified by a tradition of the aristocracy and of a reigning dynasty but failing to include subjects into the idea of community. However, in the XVIII century, the political nation evolved because the sovereignty passed from the King to the whole nation, with all citizens with equal rights and duties. The fundamental role of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Empire, and the Romanticism period in this evolution cannot be neglected. See *Gentile, E.*, *Né Stato né Nazione. Italiani senza meta*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2013, 36-37.

⁷ *Biltekin, N.*, supra note 4, 255-265.

that women's conventionalized roles were formally delimited of those wives complementing their husband's ambitions".⁸

The situation about women's condition in diplomatic affairs seemed to change only at the beginning of the XX century with a "shy" opening toward them. A first sign, for instance, was article 7 of the League of Nations Covenant prescribing that "All positions under or in connection with the League, including the Secretariat, shall be open equally to men and women."⁹ Thus, as *Herren* highlights, improving the position of women in a previously unknown way for international relations.¹⁰ In addition to this, in 1934, the US President, *Franklin Delano Roosevelt*, appointed the first US woman, *Ruth Bryan Owen*, as the Ambassador to Denmark.

This could be considered huge progress to promote the active role of women in diplomacy but equality between men and women was still far to be achieved; indeed, in the same year of the appointment of the first woman as the Ambassador to the US, the British Government formally prohibited the admission of women to the ordinary diplomatic career.¹¹ Hence, for most of the XX century, women continued to be considered "the disturbing factor" in a male job, as inferred by several measures to limit the role of women in the masculine realm of diplomacy. Measures that could be political and legal: political, for instance, were the actions of several foreign ministers to block the appointment of women in some specific offices; legal and ignominious were the restriction imposed on female diplomats, such as the UK ban on married women, hampering their mobility, which was removed only in 1973 under the blows of feminists movement of Women's liberation.¹²

⁸ *Sluga, G.*, supra note 4, 6.

⁹ Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 7, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art7.

¹⁰ *Herren, M.*, Gender and International Relations through the Lens of the League of Nations (1919-1945), supra note 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹² *McCarthy, H.*, Gendering Diplomatic History. Women in the British Diplomatic Service, circa 1919-1972, supra note 4, 167-181.

Today, the situation is changed and, luckily, the number of women appointed as ambassadors or introduced in the foreign service largely upraised, though other steps have still to be done as “not all ambassadorships are equal weight”,¹³ Making it relevant to analyze the number of women appointed as ambassadors in prestigious places.

Building on a historical perspective, this article aims to recollect the evolution of women's role in diplomacy, from the “passive” presence besides their husbands to the present day. This analysis shows the benefits their participation can provide and the relevance of their contribution as “builders of civilization”.¹⁴

2. Women in Middle Ages International Politics: Selected Case-studies

Looking at wealthy women of the upper classes, relevant examples of women who strongly impinged on international politics, alliances, and destinies of a kingdom also emerged in the “traditional” era of the Middle Ages. The stories of the Queen of Longobards *Rosamunda* and the Great Countess *Matilde* of Canossa, differing in outcomes and modes of action, can be mentioned here.

After the defeat and death in the battle of his father *Cunimondo*, King of the Gepids, *Rosamunda* was kidnapped by and forcefully married to Albino, King of the Longobards (567 A.D.).¹⁵ For years, a very educated woman, *Rosamunda* plotted against her husband until she put on the Longobard's throne *Elmichi*, *Alboino's* brother and her lover, with the help of the Byzantines, enemies of *Alboino*. However, his kingdom was short-lived because of the opposition of some Longobard nobles hostile to *Rosamunda's* faction. Hence, the Queen moved from Pavia to Ravenna, where she changed

¹³ *Towns, A., Niklasson, B.*, Gender, International Status, and Ambassador Appointments, in *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2017, 13, 522.

¹⁴ *Pizan, C.*, de, *La Città delle Dame*, *Caraffi, P.* ed., Carocci, Roma, 2004. For deepening the analysis about the role of *Christine de Pizan* in the Middle Ages also see also *Barbero, A.*, *Donne, madonne, mercanti e cavalieri. Sei storie medievali*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2015.

¹⁵ For more information about the story and the legend of *Rosamunda*, see *Diacono, P.*, *Storia dei Longobardi*, (*Zanella, A.* ed.), Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, Segrate, 1991, ๘๘ *Jarnut, J.*, *Storia dei Longobardi*, Einaudi, Torino, 2002.

her mind and decided to marry *Longino*, the Exarch of the Eastern Emperor in Ravenna and her first supporter, who aimed at submitting the *Longobards'* Kingdom to the Byzantine Empire. Nevertheless, while trying to assassinate *Elmichi*, whom she married to put him on the throne but now became an obstacle to her marriage with *Longino*, she also died. *Rosamunda's* attempts of usurpation were not only based on revenge. However, they were clear political acts underscoring her awareness of the practice, both among *Longobards* and Byzantines, that the King's widow had the power to designate the new King either by associating him with the throne or by marrying him.

If *Rosamunda's* case did not modify the course of the history of the Longobards, the political and military action of Great Countess *Matilde* of Canossa proved more impactful. Exploiting her strong education and ability to speak both the *Teutonic's'* and Francs' languages, the Great Countess played a central role in the Investiture Controversy.¹⁶ Between Pope *Gregoire VII* and the Holy Roman Emperor *Henry IV*. Indeed, when the Pope excommunicated *Henry IV* (1076), the latter decided to meet *Gregoire VII* in Italy while hosted at *Matilde's* (1077). In that circumstance, also known as the "Humiliation of Canossa", the Emperor was obliged to kneel for three days and three nights on the snow in front of the gate of *Matilde's* castle, with ashes on his head as a sign of regret, before to meet the Pope and obtain the revocation of the previous communication. Though she was the Emperor's cousin, also afterward, *Matilde* remained the strongest ally of the Pope. In 1079, for instance, she put all her domains under the lordship of *Gregoire VII*, causing *Henry IV's* reaction. During the Council of Brixen (1080), where the antipope *Clement III* was nominated, the Emperor declared *Matilde* fallen from her titles and banished her from the Empire.

¹⁶ Generally, this name indicates the conflict in Medieval Europe between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor regarding the competence of choosing and installing Bishops and Abbots of monasteries. The conventional end of this conflict is identified in 1122 when, with the Concordat of Worms, it was declared, along with other reforms, that the Church detained the power over investiture. See *Blumenthal, U. R.*, *The Investiture Controversy* for further details about this controversy. *Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1991, and *Miller, M. C.*, *Power and the Holy in the Age of Investiture Conflict. A Brief History with Documents*, Bedford/St. Martins, 2005.

This new scenario did not scare the Great Countess, who, despite the exile of the Pope and the defeat at Volta Mantovana, created a new army that defeated the Emperor in the battle of Sorbara (July 2, 1084). Besides her ability as a Commander in Chief showed in this vicissitude, Matilde also proved to be a strong political strategist in the plots for destroying the power of Henry IV, both when she incited the son of Emperor, *Conrad*, against the father and when she used the “scandalous confessions” of *Henry IV’s* wife, *Praxedes* for her aims.¹⁷ As said, however, she was not an enemy of the Empire but *Henry IV*. Indeed, after his death, in 1106, *Matilde*, with a clever political move, supported his heir *Henry V*. The latter awarded her the title of Vice Queen of Italy during a visit to the Castle of Bianello between 6 and 11 May of 1111.

The Great Countess, under whose rule the domain of Canossa reached the maximum extension, died on July 24, 1115. As a fair homage to an essential protagonist of her era, since 1645, she rests in a monumental sepulcher *Gian Lorenzo Bernini* made for her in Saint Peter in Rome,¹⁸ Named Onore e Gloria d'Italia (Honor and Glory of Italy).¹⁹

These stories underscore that even in the wrongly considered “dark Age” *par excellence*, there were important examples of extraordinary women acting in politics with the same power as men and influencing the destinies of realms.

3. The Birth of Modern Diplomacy During the Renaissance

Nevertheless, it shall be acknowledged that during the XV and XVI centuries, upper-class women began to be more educated, studying classical

¹⁷ During the 1095 Council of Piacenza, Praxedes denounced her husband's "depravations". They accused Henry IV of segregating her against her will, forcing her to participate in orgies, and trying to officiate a black mass on her naked body. See *Il Castello di Carpineti: Mille anni di storia nella pietra*, *Lenzini, F.* ed., Altralinea Edizioni, Firenze, 2015.

¹⁸ Besides the Great Countess *Matilde*, only Queen Christine of Sweden, *Charlotte* of Lusignan, and Princess *Mary Clementine Sobieska* have a tomb in the Church of Saint Peter in Rome.

¹⁹ About the life of the Great Countess Matilde of Canossa, see *Ferri, E.*, *La Grancontessa. Vita, avventure e misteri di Matilde di Canossa*, Mondadori, Milano, 2004 and *Golinelli, P.*, *Matilde e i Canossa*, Mursia, Milano, 2004.

subjects and becoming more active in convivial situations as well as in regular activities, where, in the absence of their hu, they had to defend the interests of their family. Though it evolved into a rational and modern discipline only, later on, it notably was during the Italian Renaissance. Due to the small states characterizing this period from a political perspective, modern diplomacy originated.²⁰ In this framework, where diplomacy was “Not just as a form of representation among sovereign states but rather as “a close-knit and multiform network of exchanges, agreements, alliances, information interests, and dynastic affairs”,²¹ noblewomen “Were themselves objects of diplomatic exchanges in marriages that cemented European political alliances and were well placed to participate in the full range of political interactions.”²².

This *prima facie* may underscore only that women continued to be commodified for dynastic interests in this period. Nevertheless, some of them proved able to exploit this situation to become “statesmen behind the scene”, strongly influencing the fate of the Kingdoms they were ruling. This was true in the European environment and in the other most powerful Empire of those times, the Ottoman Empire.

²⁰ This, for instance, is the opinion of Garrett Mattingly that in his own “Renaissance Diplomacy”, published in 1955, affirmed that modern diplomacy was born in that period. According to the author, cited by *Carolyn James*: “the rulers and ruling of elites of the Italian peninsula’s diverse range of regimes, from republics such as Florence and Venice to the principalities of the north, remained so aware of the insecurity of their political tenure that they sought to unify their fractious urban population by waging war on neighboring states. By 1460, the debilitating aspects of this predatory approach to maintaining authority were too apparent, as the economies of even the wealthiest cities buckled under the strain of large military outlays. The notion that a balance of power should be a desirable outcome of diplomatic engagement gained currency; at the same time, resident ambassadors became an increasingly important means by which Italian rulers kept an eye on each other, maintained dialogue, and attempted to avert conflict”. See *James, C.*, *Women, and Diplomacy in Renaissance Italy*, supra note 4, 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²² *Frigo, D.*, “Small States” and Diplomacy: Mantua and Modena, in *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450-1800*, *Frigo, D.* ed. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, 157.

3.1 The Italian Renaissance and the Ottoman “Sultanate of Women”: Stories of Powerful Women

In the scenario of the Italian Renaissance, for instance, the *Marquise Barbara* of Brandenburg (1422-1481), *Ludovico II Gonzaga's* wife, was a very important figure. She had a pivotal role in the negotiations between the Holy See and the Holy Roman Empire, as it proved that Mantua was chosen as the venue for the Imperial Diet in 1459. Besides the friendly relations and harmony she contributed to maintaining in the peninsula thanks to her correspondence with the noblewomen of the other Italian states, the Marquise was an important point of reference for all the Germans traveling in Italy. Indeed, it was a tradition for those engaged in diplomacy to stop their journey in her lands and pay respect to her.

Similarly, *Eleonora d'Aragona*, daughter of King of Naples and wife of *Ercole I d'Este*, acquired a central role in the realization and reinforcement of the diplomatic relations of the *d'Este* family. For instance, during the so-called Pazzi War of 1478 – when her father and husband took opposite sides – she regularly communicated with the other powerful families. She accepted occasional ambassadors just as *Barbara* of Brandenburg did. Furthermore, in the relations with Venice, *Eleonora* insisted on a full acknowledgment of her superior status as the daughter of the King of Naples. During her twenty years of marriage with *Ercole I*, she hardly worked to support the dynastic ambitions of the house of *d'Este*.

As *Francesco II Gonzaga's* wife, *Eleonora's* daughter *Isabella d'Este*, who arrived in Mantua in 1490, became a prominent figure in the Italian Renaissance. Isabella was trained for the duties she was going to accomplish and immediately became fundamental for the diplomatic affairs of her husband *Francesco*. First, she began to attend administrative tasks in the Mantua chancery and was deputized by her husband when he was out of his property. The spouses were so in agreement that they realized a complex game of double diplomacy through which they achieved to dismiss *Francesco's* guardian and powerful right-hand of the previous ruler, *Francesco Secco d'Aragona*. During the so-called “*Borgia* crisis”, when *Cesare “Valentino” Borgia* tried to conquer all the north of Italy, the couple played a

“parallel diplomacy” based on dilatory tactics and subterfuges. *Isabella* then obtained personal success in 1509, when she could liberate her husband *Francesco*, incarcerated by *Venetians* after the Casaloldo's battle. Indeed, the Marquise patiently negotiated to free her husband from jail, thus avoiding sending their eldest son *Federico* to Venice to replace the father as a hostage; the son was sent to Rome and entrusted to the “lovely hands” of Pope *Giulio* II.

However, when she was 40 years old, *Isabella* became unhappy to be “her husband's obedient instrument in the couple's complex games of double diplomacy”.²³ In 1513-1514, she visited Rome and Milan and, through a “diplomacy of ball and banquets”, she assumed the role of political advisor for her inexperienced nephew, *Massimiliano Sforza*, new Duke of Milan; for his benefit, for instance, she obtained that her brother *Alfonso*, the Duke of Ferrara, appointed a supportive figure as the new Ferrara's Ambassador in Milan. This created several frictions between *Isabella* and her husband *Francesco*, which eased only when she arrived at the papal court in Rome in 1514, worked vigorously for *Gonzaga's* dynastic projects, and obtained by Pope *Leone X* the title of “Beata” for the Mantuan Dominican tertiary, *Osanna Andreasi*.

Nevertheless, according to *Carolyn James*: By 1514, *Isabella* had become so politically experienced that she sought recognition from her husband that she could, with appropriate discretion, deploy her women to achieve diplomatic ends and reconcile her various dynasty loyalties to the ultimate benefit of her husband and natal kin, without constant direction and surveillance. However, the conjugal battles about when *Isabella* might become the woman with a mind of her own, a role she had rehearsed so often on the diplomatic stage for strategic effect, were never satisfactorily resolved.²⁴

The same ability to successfully operate for pursuing dynastic purposes can be found among the Sultanas of the Ottoman Empire.

²³ *James, C.*, supra note 4, 22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

The HaremHarem,²⁵ Indeed, has been wrongly identified as a reign of pleasure and slavery in which women were considered “toys” for satisfying Sultans' pleasures. Conversely, it was based on very complex hierarchies and complicated internal relations, thus proving as a “gym” for the *cursus honorum* of the so-called “Sultanate of Women” (1533-1656), whose members were extremely efficient in the diplomatic field.

In reality, “participation in interdynastic diplomacy was not an unprecedented activity for royal women in states of Turkish origin. It was an old Turkish custom for the ruler to send a female elder of the dynastic family, especially his mother, as an emissary to intercede with other rulers”.²⁶ However, “The increasing seclusion of the royal family, men, and women alike, meant that by sixteenth-century Ottoman women no longer functioned as ambassadors but through the exchange of letters and gifts they still could create diplomatic channel across borders”. Besides, it is worthy of remembering that “the more regular presence of European ambassadors in Istanbul in the later of sixteenth-century created a local arena for diplomatic activity” allowing more frequent contacts with European rulers and ambassadors, which also confirm “the considerable degree to which the Ottoman Empire was a member of the greater European diplomatic community in these years”.²⁷

²⁵ “To an ottoman subject, the term “Harem” did not connote a space defined exclusively by sexuality. The word HaremHarem is a term of respect, redolent of religious purity and honor, and evocative of the requisite obeisance. The word HaremHarem is one of an important family of words in the vocabulary of Islam derived from the Arabic root h-r-m. These words partake of one or both of two general – and related – meanings associated with the root: to be forbidden or unlawful and to declare sacred, inviolable, or taboo. A harem is, by definition, a sanctuary or a sacred precinct. By implication, it is a space in which public access is forbidden or controlled, and the presence of certain individuals or certain modes of behavior is forbidden. The private quarter in a domestic residence and, by extension, its female residents are also referred to as a "harem," comes from the Islamic of restricting access to these quarterly, specific access by males beyond a particular degree of consanguinity with the resident females. It is gender-specific only in its reference to the women of a family”. See *Pierce, L. P.*, supra note 5, 3-5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

The first woman who interpreted this different diplomatic role was Hurrem, known among Europeans as *Roxelana*, the powerful Haseki ²⁸Of Süleyman the Magnificent. She was a constant and influential presence on his side, strongly impinged on the Empire's destiny. For instance, during the campaign against the Safavid Empire, she was the Sultan's eyes in the capital city. Furthermore, aiming at increasing his son-in-law (*Rüstem* Pasha) reputation as the Defensor of the European Province during the absence of the Sultanim, she engaged in a productive correspondence with Sultanim, the sister of the Safavid Monarch Tahmasp I, who, in a letter about the signature of Treaty of Amasya (1555) openly recognized that “there was no doubt that *Hurrem* and the Grand Vezir (*Rüstem* Pasha) were the authors and the cause of this goods deed”.²⁹ Besides the correspondence with Sultanim, *Hurrem* Sultan, due to her origins, had a fruitful exchange with the King of Poland, *Sigismund* I, and with his son and successor, *Sigismund* II, that granted a durable peace between the Ottoman Empire and the Realm of Poland.

Hurrem developed a sort of “protocol” for the correspondence, which her “successors” used henceforth, essentially based on the declaration of the Sultan's peaceful intentions supported by the exchange of gifts. Furthermore, she never used a personal ambassador but acted directly as she was the Sultans voice.

Whereas *Hurrem* Sultan paved the way for a range of diplomatic action for harem women, the *Valide* who came after her could enjoy a much-extended range of action. Although without infringing the strict rules about the propriety of conduct imposed by the Harem'sHarem's discipline,³⁰ These

²⁸ The noun Haseki refers to the Favorite of the Sultan and, since *Nur Banu's* period, to the mother of the heir of the Sultan. Instead, the noun *Valide*, officially introduced during the Reign of *Mehmed* III, is generally used to indicate the mother of the Sultan. She is the female elder of the Sultan's family and has control of the HaremHarem. *Pierce, L. P.*, supra note 5, 91-148.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 221.

³⁰ A fundamental rule of proper conduct, for instance, was the observance of a proper distance, not only between the sexes but between persons of different statuses. Therefore, diplomatic contacts between foreign embassies and the *Valide* Sultan usually occurred through the intermediary of the latter's Jewish agent, known as the “Kira”. See *Pierce, L. P.*, supra note 5, 225.

women not only had more contacts with the foreign ambassadors appointed in Istanbul and had a very profitable correspondence with important heads of State for preserving peace but had more opportunities to dedicate themselves to international affairs; in several cases did not hesitate to act in their interest.³¹

Nur Banu Sultan and her daughter-in-law *Safiye* Sultan instantiate this point. Mother of *Murad* and *Selim* II's wife, *Nur Banu* Sultan, was born *Cecilia Venier-Baffo*, the illegitimate daughter of two prominent Venetian families then taken prisoner by the Ottoman admiral *Hayreddin* Pasha in 1537. She never forgot her origins and spent her diplomatic efforts to support the Republic of Venice, also trying to avoid a possible Ottoman invasion of Crete, a Venetian possession, shortly before her death. As *Hurrem* did, she developed her style. Indeed, the letters *Nur Banu* Sultan wrote to Venetian emissaries, which aimed to establish stronger commercial relations, were brief and direct; instead, more baroque were the letters she exchanged with *Catherine De' Medici*, Queen of France and regent of *Henry* III, about the renewal of the Capitulation regime established in 1536, where she also obtained the recognition of her status, the letters from *Catherina* using the opening formula: "From the Queen Mother of The King to the Sultana Queen Mother of the Grand Seigneur".

Nevertheless, even the *Valide Sultan* had to bargain her diplomatic preferences with the Sultan: for instance, *Safiye* Sultan, wife of *Murad* III and mother of *Mehmet* III, had to overcome several difficulties to obtain the Sultans favors for her English friends and their Queen, *Elizabeth* I, with whom she established a profitable correspondence. Indeed, Queen *Elizabeth*, I tried to gain the support of the Ottoman Empire to debunk the Hapsburgs politics for a long time, and, to this end, in 1593, she established an embassy in Istanbul.³² Furthermore, appointed the Ambassador Sir *Edward Barton*,

³¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

³² The history of the international relations between England and the Ottoman Empire is full of interesting details. Noteworthy, for instance, is the vicissitude of the clock for Sultan *Murad* III. Indeed, to obtain the favor of Sultan *Murad*, *Elizabeth* I sent him as a gift a clock, a masterpiece of craftsmanship. This clock was indeed a highly ornate clockwork organ, on which, according to the sources, the skilled technicians who

who accompanied *Sultan Mehmet III* in his campaign against Hapsburg in 1596. Having established a solid diplomatic relationship with the Ambassador's secretary Mr. *Pindar*, *Safiye* Sultan was troubled in persuading his husband *Murad III* to find a settlement with the Hungarians – which would have favored English interests – but was successful with her son *Mehmet III*.

In conclusion, “If not always able to persuade the Sultans to support their diplomatic preferences, *Nur Banu* and *Safiye* appear to have been able to stay off the most harmful of unfavorable decisions”.³³ Furthermore:

The very fact of communication among these four queens – *Nur Banu*, *Safiye*, *Elizabeth*, and *Catherine* – and the favors they asked of one another suggest the existence of a unique form of diplomatic contact in the last decades of the sixteenth century. These queens appear conscious of – and perhaps deliberately cultivated – their special communications as women, as mothers of rulers, *Catherine*, *Nur Banu*, and *Safiye* no doubt recognized the greater flexibility of power they enjoyed as influential presences at the heart of government without the restrictions of actual sovereignty. Moreover, *Elizabeth* may have valued the existence of this second channel of communications with the Ottomans, whom her government was so assiduously courting. Certainly, the Ottoman Sultan, bound by the protocols of inaccessibility, could not have communicated with another monarch with the directness displayed by the women’s letters.³⁴

accompanied the gift "labored for many years, toiling to complete and perfect it". Moreover, although Elizabeth I intended it for Murad III, by the time the organ had completed the long sea voyage from London in 1599, his son Mehmed III received it enthusiastically. It had it assembled and tuned in the Seraglio for the entertainment of his HaremHarem. See *Barbour, R.*, Power, and Distant Display: Early English “Ambassadors” in Moghul India in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 61 (3/4), 1998, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 343-368.

³³ *Pierce, L. P.*, supra note 5, 226.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

4. The Rise of the “Ambadress” and the Beginning of the “Salon Era”: Women in the International Political Affairs During the XVI and XVII Centuries

During the XVI-XVII centuries, the field of diplomacy was enriched by another term very important for this article. The term in question is “ambadress,” which is detectable very largely in all English sources concerning the diplomacy activities of the XVII century.³⁵ This noun is not referred to the quality of the modern conception of this word but indicates the “status” of the wives that accompanied the husbands in their appointed place. As data demonstrate,³⁶ This phenomenon grew during the XVI and XVII and created a chain of expertise among women. Indeed,

As the diplomatic careers of many male ambassadors in this period saw when they moved from post to post, some wives became serial ambadresses stationed in several countries [...] experienced ambadresses could provide useful training to future ambassadorial wives, just as male ambassadors routinely sought advice about their posting from those who had served before them.³⁷

The constant presence of these women in the main courts of Europe, particularly in the French one, contributed to modifying the uses and protocols of diplomacy. The changes in the way the courts ceremonials considered these new figures are an example of the impact of the ambadresses and the introduction of the figure of the *Conducteur des Ambassadeurs* under the reign of *Henri III* at the end of the XVI century.³⁸ In addition, the practice of “gift-giving” already examined in the section about Sultanas, although often ignored by theorists concerning the European

³⁵ *Allen, G.*, supra note 4, 618.

³⁶ According to the sources, the rate of accompanied English ambassadors moved from 25% in the XVI Century to 57% in the XVII century. See *Bell, G. M.*, *A Handlist of British Diplomatic Representatives, 1590-1688*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.

³⁷ *Allen, G.*, supra note 4 622.

³⁸ *Hugon, A.*, *L'étranger à la cour de France selon l'ambassade espagnole auprès du Roi très chrétien (1^{re} moitié du XVII^e siècle)*, Bulletin du Centre de recherche du château de Versailles, 2016, <http://journals.openedition.org/crcv/13824>.

environment, was largely used in Europe as a powerful weapon in diplomatic affairs. Indeed, sending a present to a male ambassador could be considered a corruption attempt. In contrast, a present to the ambassadress was considered differently even if questions of appropriateness were relevant to deciding the circumstances in which to present the gift.³⁹

However, the ambassadresses had not only these “indirect” functions. Throughout the court’s courtesies and friendship relationships, these women created very strong links with important figures and exploited them to influence international dynamics. This kind of gendered relationship, reinforced when the ambassadress improved the local language, has often allowed them to work beside the male Ambassador to obtain important information.⁴⁰ In some cases, indeed, a real “intelligence service” of the ambassadresses, managed personally by the Chief of State, existed, as in the case of the so-called Elizabethan ambassadresses, among which it is worth remembering *Elizabeth Hoby* and *Margery Norris*, who capitalized their relations with Catherine de’ Medici providing for a constant flow of useful information to Queen *Elizabeth I*.⁴¹

Madame de Staël and the “Salon Era”

The growth of women's weight in the field of diplomatic affairs, as the experience of ambassadresses demonstrated, contributed to the development of another form of participation in this sphere represented by the “cultural salon”. Although, at first sight, it may suggest a “secondary and relative”

³⁹ To understand the evaluation of the opportunity beyond this practice, two examples can be considered: when in 1627, Charles Emmanuel I, Duke of Savoy, presented a diamond to *Anne Wake*, *Isaac Wake*’s wife, to obstacle a possible Anglo-Spain treaty of peace, and, when in 1665 Mariana of Austria gave a diamond to *Anne Fanshawe* meanwhile her husband *Richard* was negotiating a trade treaty between England and Spain. See *The Memoirs of Anne, Lady Halkett, Ann, Lady Fanshawe*, *Loftis, J.* ed., Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1979, 174.

⁴⁰ Here, it is possible to mention another example referred to the experience of *Anne Fanshawe* as an ambassadress. When her husband *Richard* left her in Madrid in 1666 to go to Lisbon to arrange a truce between Spain and Portugal to advantage English interest, he could rely in this mission on the information *Anne* sent him, thanks to her good relations with the Queen Regent *Mariana of Austria*. *Allen, G.*, supra note 4, 626.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 623.

participation of women in diplomacy, until the first half of the XIX century, it proved a useful tool thanks to the activism of extraordinary women who importantly affected the evolution of the diplomatic affairs. Indeed, in a period when international affairs were considered, “the mutual transactions between sovereigns, women, and men involved themselves in the formation of foreign policies, and negotiations between sovereigns and across state borders”.⁴² Nevertheless, women's involvement was not peaceful. They “were vulnerable to criticism and attack on the grounds not only of impropriety but also that their actions represented the antithesis of professional diplomatic and political practices”.⁴³

The personal vicissitude of *Madame de Staël* instantiate this case. Baroness and ambassadress thanks to the marriage, in 1786, with Swedish Ambassador in France, *Baron Erik Magnus Staël von Holstein*, and authoress of masterpieces like “Ten years of exile”, “Considerations on the French Revolution” and “On Germany”, *Madame de Staël*, born *Germaine Necker*, was a very influential figure of her time, with an essential cultural influence that also made of her one of the respondents in the overthrowing of the Napoleonic regime. Indeed, even if historians often overshadowed her role in diplomacy and international politics.⁴⁴ *Madame de Staël's Salon*, which she proved to have covered with the protection of diplomatic immunity, was an important tool in building the anti-Napoleonic European coalition.⁴⁵ Furthermore, probably played a direct role in the appointment of *Talleyrand* as French Foreign Minister. She was able to bring together diplomats and foreign ministers to foster relationships across coalitions lines and promote her liberal views about constitutional guarantees against the abuses of political power and in defense of the freedoms of religion, press, and association.⁴⁶

⁴² Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture, *Adams, R., Cox, R.*, eds., Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke, 2011, 2.

⁴³ *Sluga, G.*, supra note 4, 131.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴⁵ *Shelagh, M. R.*, Sentiments of Travel: Madame de Staël on Sweden, in *Moderna Språk*, vol. 90 (2), 1996, 190-199.

⁴⁶ *Sluga, G.*, supra note 4, 126.

In this activity, she was favored by the fact that her Salon was held, during the years, in different parts of Europe: in 1812, it was held at the Hotel Europe in Saint Petersburg, where the Baroness tied with *Tsar Alexander* and General *Jean Baptiste Bernadotte*; during winter 1812-1813, it then moved in Stockholm, allowing her to expand the anti-Napoleonic coalition to Prussia, Britain, and Austria; holding it in London in 1813, *Madame de Staël* engaged with local political elites and started to plan the terms of the post-war international peace; finally, back in Paris in 1814, the Salon contributed to the discussions about the Treaty of Paris and the Congress of Wien. Loyal to her liberal ideas, she acted so that the Treaty of May 1814 punished *Napoleon* but saved the French people.

Aware of her influence, *Napoleon* considered her pen “fatal” and, having recognized that “all the partisans republicans, and royalist she put them in each others presence; she united them all against me, she attacked me from all sides”,⁴⁷ Tried to limit her influence by founding “alternative salons”.⁴⁸

An unsuccessful attempt that, however, is an important proof of the “influence equal if not superior to that many of better-known men identified with these events”.⁴⁹

5. From the Twentieth Century to the Present: How is Going the “Female Colonization” of the Diplomatic World?

In the XX century, finally, women abandoned the shadows of cultural salons and started a (slow) process of “female colonization.”⁵⁰ Of the diplomatic world.

⁴⁷ *Kale, S. D.*, Women, Salons and the State in the Aftermath of the French Revolution, in *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 13 (2), 2002, 65.

⁴⁸ “Foreign ministers, including Talleyrand, ran these official salons. They took the form of drawing-room receptions or dinners hosting visiting dignitaries and diplomats. They were spaces where the women or “Maitresse de Maison” did the honors of the house, supported her husband, and cultivated respect for the Emperor by enforcing civility and silencing frondeurs”. For more information, see *Sluga, G.*, supra note 4, 125.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁰ *Sarah Richardson* identified the diplomatic world as “an area ideal for colonization by female politicians”. See *Richardson, S.*, *The Political Worlds of Women. Gender and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Routledge, London & New York, 2013, 176.

The XX Century opened under the best auspices, as the article mentioned above 7 of the League of Nations Covenant demonstrates. This provision was joined by the laudatory articles about women's role in this organization published by *The Washington Post* and other important international newspapers.⁵¹ as well as the decisions of Hungary, the USSR, and the USA⁵² to appoint female Chiefs of Missions for the first time, all seemed to be signs that something was changing for women and that they were finally recognized with an active role in diplomacy.

Nevertheless, most of the diplomatic services of the European States did not accept female diplomats as equal to their male counterparts. In this sense, the case of Great Britain is illustrative. For instance, in 1934, the Government of Great Britain decided to block the admission of women to the ordinary diplomatic career.⁵³ Thanks to the duties accomplished during the II World War, a decision was revoked in 1946 when the Foreign Office opened its doors to the first generation of female diplomats selected among those who received a university education. Nevertheless, it is worth considering the elitist approach that followed this decision. Indeed, "Although the 1943 reforms had outlined the necessity of recruiting candidates "from any social sphere", the diplomatic service continued to be dominated into the post-war period by a social elite drawn from Britain's top public schools and ancient universities. The proportion of new entrants to the A-Stream educated at the public schools between 1950 and 1959 was 83,2 percent. The proportion holding degrees from Oxford and Cambridge was even higher at 89,1

⁵¹ *Drexel, C.*, Young Women Combining Beauty, and Brains Serve in League Headquarters, *The Washington Post*, September 9, 1923, 29. Several articles were also dedicated to the job of Dame Rachel Crowdy, Chief of the Social Question Division and Opium Traffic Secretariat of the League of Nations from 1919 to 1931: *Dame Rachel Crowdy* Tells of Social Work of League; Fight on Drug Traffic and White Slavery Spreads as Nations Support Geneva Program, *The New York Times*, June 20, 1926, 14 66 Tell of Progress in Opium Control. *Dame Rachel Crowdy* here on Olympic, Describes Geneva Campaign on Drugs, *The New York Times*, February 21, 1929, 12.

⁵² See the appointments of *Rosika Schwimmer* (Hungary) to Switzerland in 1918; *Aleksandra Kollontai* (USSR) to Norway in 1924; *Ruth Bryan Orwell* (USA) to Denmark in 1933; *Florence Jaffray Harriman* (USA) to Norway (1937). For more information, see *Nash, P.*, supra note 4, 222-239.

⁵³ *Herren, M.*, supra note 4, 182.

percent. Twenty years later, these figures had dropped considerably to 56,1 and 67,5 percent respectively but the public-school Oxbridge-nexus remained strong”.⁵⁴ Besides, the case of the United Kingdom, and the Commonwealth by extension, is peculiar even for the marriage bar, preventing women from marrying should they want to keep their position in diplomacy. This bar, which slowly disappeared from other sectors of British bureaucracy in the years after 1945, indeed persisted in diplomacy. Already considered a “disturbing factor.”⁵⁵ By the high spheres, female diplomats were therefore hampered in their career development by the pretended fear that, after marriage, they could leave their positions due to their husbands' refusal to sacrifice their profession and follow them abroad. The impact of this measure was relevant when one considers that seven out of eighteen women appointed to the administrative grade between 1946 and 1954 resigned because they married.⁵⁶ In addition, the marriage bar avoided the service and the complex task of confronting “another troubling and transgressive figure – that of the diplomatic husband”.⁵⁷

In 1973, thanks to the commitment of women's movements and the strong opposition of female diplomats, the ban was finally removed. After abolishing the marriage bar, first female British ambassador, Dame Anne Warburton, was appointed in Denmark. This appointment confirms an approach to defining female diplomats' destinations common to several countries. Indeed, the first women appointed as Chief of Mission were usually destined to Scandinavian or other North-European countries already characterized by higher gender equality.

At present days, this trend seems still evident. Indeed, analyzing the appointment of 6.990 ambassadors made by the 50 highest-ranked countries in terms of GDP in 2014, most of the female Chiefs of Mission belong to Northern European Countries (35 percent) and, at the same time, these are the States that receive the larger number of female ambassadors (22 percent). Conversely, areas such as Asia and the Middle East have fewer female Chiefs

⁵⁴ *McCarthy, H.*, supra note 12, 172.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

of Mission, both appointed and received (10 percent and 11 percent for Asia and 6 percent and 10 percent for the Middle East).⁵⁸

The level of representation is another important point emerging from this analysis. Acknowledging that “not all ambassadorships are equal in weight”,⁵⁹ It is noteworthy to underline that frequently female ambassadors are in charge in the small embassies of low-status countries that are not required full-time representation. According to the data (31 percent of women compared to 26 percent of men), a proof of the will to prevent women from leading prestigious embassies that do not affect their male counterparts.

6. Concluding Remarks

So far, what has been said seems to confirm the version considering diplomatic affairs as “a patriarchal stronghold [...] one of the most male-dominated spheres of the state and one in which women have had difficulty entering”.⁶⁰

The reasons for the “male overrepresentation” are multiple. A relevant one can be individuated in the transposition in international relations of the stereotypes about the masculinity ideal type, namely in the equation between men and power. Indeed, considering that the Ambassador is the “head of diplomatic missions” and the prestige of this position is “in turn in large part a function of international military and economic hierarchies”,⁶¹ It is likely that the State, appointing a male ambassador in a strategic and prestigious venue, wants to reinforce its image by associating it with masculinity's concepts of strength, domination. Conversely, appointing a female ambassador in the same venue could be a weakness symptom. This explanation, coupled with the observation of the increasing number of women in the lower levels of diplomatic offices.

⁵⁸ *Towns, A., Niklasson, B.*, Gender, International Status, and Ambassador Appointments, in *Foreign Policy Studies*, 2017, 13, 521-540.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 522.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Conclusively, as in other fields where women's political representation comes into question,⁶² Putnam's Law of increasing disproportion seems to be confirmed as long as it is possible to observe that women are "overrepresented" in the lower levels of diplomacy and "underrepresented" in the higher positions. The presence of this disparity indeed demonstrated, in the sector of international affairs as in others, that the invisible barrier preventing women from reaching the top of the hierarchy, the infamously known glass ceiling,⁶³ is far from broken.

⁶² *O'Neill, B., Stewart, D. K.*, Gender and Political Party Leadership in Canada, *Party Politics*, 15, November 2009, 737-75.

⁶³ This metaphor, coined by *Marilyn Loden* in 1978, is generally used to indicate an invisible barrier preventing women from reaching the top of the hierarchy. Today, this metaphor has been applied to identify the obstacles for the members of all minorities to achieve a certain level in the hierarchy. See *Weyer, B.*, *Twenty years later: explaining the persistence of the glass ceiling for women leaders in Women in Management Review*, Emerald Publishing, Bingley, 2007.