

Andrew Gillet, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West, 411-533*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xxiv + 335 pp. ISBN 0 521 81349 2.

In the year 749, according to the so-called *Annales regni Francorum*, 'Bishop Burchard of Würzburg and the chaplain Fulrad were sent to Pope Zacharias to inquire whether it was good or not that the kings of the Franks should wield no royal power, as was the case at the time. Pope Zacharias instructed Pippin that it was better to call him king who had the royal power than one who did not'.¹ Hence, one of the most significant turning points in the history of the early medieval West — the deposition of the last Merovingian and the crowning of the first Carolingian king — was the result of a diplomatic negotiation between the Frankish *major domus* Pippin III and the Pope. This, after reading Andrew Gillet, is not at all surprising. As he clearly demonstrates in the book under review here, formal embassies, official legations, and political envoys were a fundamental aspect of public life, which continued from the late Roman Empire well into the early Middle Ages, and thus 'the framework for the political changes of the late antique West was formed by the largely unrecorded travails and persuasions of countless envoys' (277).

In *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West*, Gillet focuses, as he puts it, 'not on "diplomacy" but on its agent, the envoy' (2). The temporal limits of his study are the years 411-533, and his geographic scope is the western provinces of the Roman Empire and Constantinople. No doubt this temporal and geographical junction, which saw the disintegration of the Roman world and the emergence of the new Barbarian kingdoms, was an important moment in the formation of the early medieval West. It was also a crucial moment as far as the history of embassies and envoys is concerned, since during the fragmentation of the old Roman order disunity gave rise not only to conflict, but also to communication and negotiation. After a short introduction that surveys the framework and conventions of embassies in the classical world (chapter 1), Gillet examines four case studies, which are largely dictated by the available sources — the *Chronicle* of Hydatius of Lemica in Gallaecia (chapter 2), Sidonius Apollinaris' *Panegyric* on Avitus (chapter 3), Saints' Lives (chapter 4), and Cassiodorus' *Variae* (chapter 5). Hydatius' *Chronicle* is by far the fullest account of the complex patterns of political communication in the Barbarian West, and hence it was used by Gillet as a descriptive model for the political activity that underlay fifth-century politics. As he points out clearly, 'several main characteristics of political communication in the late antique West are evident in his [i.e. Hydatius'] account: the frequency and importance of diplomatic traffic, albeit neglected by other historical sources; the complex interaction of authorities, both among the monarchs of the western kingdoms and the empire, and between various social groups within individual kingdoms; the concurrent maintenance of many bilateral relations by each power; and the political functions of embassies other than negotiation of immediate issues' (74).

Sidonius' *Panegyric* relates how in 439 Eparchius Avitus, then the praetorian prefect of Gaul, had managed to end the hostility between the Visigoths and the empire by exercising his personal influence on the court of Toulouse. Although Sidonius' *Panegyric* is much more detailed than any of the accounts given by Hydatius, it is an extremely unreliable historical source, especially when it addresses the working of embassies and communication between the imperial governments, the Gallic provincials and the Gothic court. Sidonius' Avitus is indeed a fictitious figure, but the assumption underlying the literary construction of Sidonius' *Panegyric* reveals 'the vitality of traditional patterns of political communication in the new circumstances of the fifth-century West' (85). This continuity is also apparent in a series of Saints' Lives, which describe the role of bishops and other 'holy men' as envoys, and which, according to Gillet, 'were a reaction to the increasing social value of the role of envoy in public life' (114). Similarly, the writing of Cassiodorus, which gives us the royal Ostrogothic point of view, illustrates the role of traditional

¹ *Annales regni Francorum*, ed. F. Kurze, *MGH SRG in usum scholarum* 6 (Hannover 1895), s.a. 749, 8. I cite the English translation by B.W. Scholz, *Carolingian Chronicles* (Ann Arbor 1972), 39.

forms of epistolography and spoken eloquence in communication among imperial and barbarian rulers.

In the last chapter, entitled 'Negotium agendum', Gillet shifts his attention to the practices and conventions of communication by formal embassies; in other words, this chapter focuses on the 'protocol', the ceremonies and the rituals that surrounded negotiations and exchanges of embassies. This is, unfortunately, the weakest part of the book. Obviously, the PhD thesis on which Gillet's book is based was submitted too early to take account of Philippe Buc's *The Dangers of Ritual* (Princeton and Oxford 2001). Of course, one must not (or rather should not) accept everything Buc says in his book. But he does make some valid points as far as the analysis of our sources on rituals is concerned, and taking account of these and the general debate Buc's book has generated might have benefited Gillet's discussion in this chapter. On a more general point, I should have liked to see the topic discussed by Gillet connected more closely to the development of political ideology in the early medieval barbarian West.

These reservations aside, Gillet has produced an extremely learned and engaging study that deserves a very warm welcome from everyone interested in the transformation of the Roman world and the emergence of the early Middle Ages. It is lucid, fully documented, and it lays a very strong basis for any further research in the field.

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Jean A. Straus, *L'achat et la vente des esclaves dans l'Égypte romaine. Contribution papyrologique à l'étude de l'esclavage dans une province orientale de l'Empire romain*. Archiv für Papyrusforschung 14. München and Leipzig: K.G. Saur, 2004. xxiv + 373 pp. 6 planches. ISBN 3 598 77947 0.¹

L'esclavage fut un élément constitutif important de la structure sociale et économique de l'Antiquité dans le sens large du mot, c'est-à-dire y compris l'Ancien Orient. Ses dimensions, ses formes, son importance variaient selon région et période mais on ne peut pas étudier l'histoire du monde ancien sans le prendre en considération. C'est pourquoi la littérature concernant l'esclavage est énorme² et augmente incessamment. Elle consiste³ en travaux consacrés à l'esclavage

¹ L'auteur profite de l'occasion pour remercier le Prof. H. Heinen qui lui a fourni généreusement des informations précieuses.

² Voir les bibliographies: M. Haag, H. Kohring, M. Ludwig, *Bibliographie zur Erforschung der antiken Sklaverei im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, manuscrit inédit, Mainz, 1965 (Voir *Gnomon*, 41, 1969, 123 n. 4); *Bibliographie zur antiken Sklaverei* hrsgb. von J. Vogt, Redaktionelle Bearbeitung N. Brockmeyer, Bochum, 1971; *Sklaverei in der griechisch-römischen Welt. Eine Bibliographie wissenschaftlicher Literatur vom ausgehenden 15. Jahrhundert bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts* erarbeitet von H. Schulz-Falkenthal unter Mitarbeit von J.-F. Schulze und M. Blumentritt (Arbeiten aus der Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Sachsen-Anhalt und Halle an der Saale, 20), Halle-Saale, 1985; H. Bellen, H. Heinen (Edd.), *Bibliographie zur antiken Sklaverei* neu bearbeitet von D. Schäfer und J. Deissler auf Grundlage der von E. Herrmann in Verbindung mit N. Brockmeyer erstellten Ausgabe (Bochum, 1983) (Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei [plus loin: *FAS*], Bn. 4), Stuttgart, 2003, 2 vols: XIII + 623 pp.; VIII + 186 pp., c'est à dire XXI + 809 pp. (10415 numéros). Malheureusement, ces bibliographies sont inaccessibles à l'auteur qui est contraint de se baser sur son propre fichier, pour différentes raisons, incomplet. Voir aussi *Römische Geschichte. Eine Bibliographie* unter Mitwirkung von R. Anders, M. Gaul, B. Kreck bearbeitet von K. Christ, Darmstadt, 1976, 529, 540 (Register). On peut aussi consulter *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Slavery* I-II, New York, 1998. Le *Handwörterbuch der antiken Sklaverei* programmé par l'Académie der Wissenschaften und Literatur, Mainz, est au stade de la préparation et sera publié dans une première version en forme d'une Série de CD-ROM (information de H. Heinen).

³ Les références sont sélectives, à titre d'exemple et ne prétendent pas à être exhaustives.