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In the sixteenth century, information on foreign lands was a prized commodity. Ideological difference created by the Reformation brought war and the unrelenting need to garner up-to-date intelligence on potential allies and threats alike. While traditionally this need had been met by the letters and reports of employed ambassadors and agents, the advent of print expanded both the sources of news and the types of people involved in its transmission. The article focuses on that key model of diplomatic intelligence, the Venetian relazioni or formal relation, exploring two English examples and their possible connection to another literary genre, the ars apodemica, or art of travel. Both matured as literary forms during the later sixteenth century, and both can be seen as responding to the same need for structured detail on foreign polities.

Relazioni were the written form of the oral reports given by Venetian ambassadors to the Senate on return from embassy, and emerged during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with their origins reaching back far earlier. On submission, the documents were stored in a secret government archive for perusal by statesmen and later ambassadors. Much to the chagrin of those in charge, many did not stay secret: they circulated in manuscript, even in print, and were imitated across other city states and eventually other countries. As Gehring notes, relazioni have long been a significant source of interest for historians. For early use, see Donald E. Queller, “The Development of Ambassadorial Relazioni,” in J.R. Hale, ed., Renaissance Venice (London: Faber and Faber, 1973): 174-196 and Garrett Mattingly, Renaissance Diplomacy (London: Cape, 1955). Filippo de Vivo has, amongst others, done some excellent recent work on the relazioni and its place in the information trade: Filippo de Vivo, “How to Read Venetian Relazioni,” Renaissance and Reformation, 34 (2011): 25-59, and Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

The article analyzes two English imitations of the *relazioni*, written for the Elizabethan Principal Secretaries Sir William Cecil and Sir Francis Walsingham, respectively. The first, titled “The State of Germany,” was written by the well-known Elizabethan administrator and diplomat Robert Beale in 1569; the second, the “Discourse…of Denmark” was written in 1588 by diplomat Daniel Rogers. Gehring convincingly presents these as unusually early examples of what could be called *relazioni*, predating the 1609 “An Account of the State of France,” which is usually cited as the first English version. Through these case studies, he draws our attention to the striking similarity of the *relazione’s* subject matter to that listed in travel advice literature, demonstrating that by the end of the sixteenth century both the information itself and the invitation to gather it had entered into a more public arena.

That travelers could be involved in intelligencing is a view that the reviewer has also argued in favor of, with a focus on travelers’ and patrons’ letters in a 2016 article (referenced by Gehring) and with a fuller treatment in *Elizabethan Diplomacy and Epistolary Culture* (2021), where the relationship between the *ars apodemica* tradition and *relazioni* is made explicit. Regrettably, the contemporaneous publication of the latter with Gehring’s article means that neither work was able to draw upon the other, but it is telling that both arrive at the same essential conclusion. Both can be seen to rise out of the not-so-new “new diplomatic history,” particularly as it relates to and interacts with other fields, such as travel, information and intelligence, and the archive. The book chapter dwells in greater depth on the motivations and relationships created by letters which present themselves as Polonius-style advice on self-improving travel, but which can simultaneously be read as hard-nosed enumeration of deeply political information in precisely the same vein as the *relazioni*. Gehring’s focus is on the *relazione* as a model of intelligence production, deepening his argument with a compelling and in-depth analysis of the two English imitations, and positing an intriguing material connection between one of the discourses and an English translation of a printed book of travel advice.

One of the merits of this article is its pan-European focus, and its effective interlacing of deep contextual knowledge with strong archival evidence. A long-time expert on Beale, Gehring’s forthcoming biography is hotly anticipated. That Beale could be the earliest English author of a *relazione* is not in a way surprising: if any Elizabethan government figure were said to be at the cutting edge of the information technology of the day, it would be him. A consumer of pirated *relazioni* (Gehring notes that ten copies can be found in his library), Beale clearly valued them as political intelligence, even recommending them as a key source in his well-known 1592 discourse on the office of the Principal Secretary. Gehring deals persuasively with the potential challenge that the 1569 discourse differs in places from the typical *relazione* (specifically in its meandering, first-person style and its omission of some details that would have been essential in the Italian context),

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2 Those interested in looking at these discourses in greater detail are referred to the full transcriptions in David Scott Gehring, ed., *Diplomatic Intelligence on the Holy Roman Empire and Denmark during the Reigns of Elizabeth I and James VI: Three Treatises* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).


arguing that in subject matter and intent it was “nothing short of a full-scale relazione” (216). In some ways, this underlines the fact that this relation is not simply a copied or compiled piece, but rather represents the original research of the author on the ground, with sources including printed material, verbal discussion with counsellors, and first-hand observation—the same can be said of Roger’s discourse. Accordingly, the resulting texts acted both as informational resource and as advertisement of the men’s skills in observation and of their networks of diplomatic contacts. In Beale’s discourse, Gehring points out that the Holy Roman Emperor is not discussed at length—as would be expected for Italian ambassadors visiting the Empire—rather, Beale’s focus is on the two most important princes, the Elector Palatine Friedrich III and the Elector of Saxony, August. Beale is here studiously appealing to English policy concerns, by providing the background information necessary for rallying the Protestant princes to a defensive league against the Catholic threat. Beale is shown to be acutely aware of complex landscape of religious and political rivalry, even concluding his pitch as expert on the matter of a potential Protestant alliance by admitting its low chance of success. Despite this, he was successful in his long-term objective of building a career in the corridors of power.

Gehring posits that Daniel Rogers, being a long-time friend and colleague of Beale’s, was likely influenced by the former in his production of the “Discourse…of Denmark” in 1588. With greater diplomatic experience under his belt, Rogers’s discourse was more faithful in form to the traditional relazione model, while Beale’s indulged in more discursive tangents. Like Beale, he covered geographical territories, religion, social observation and details of the royal family and governing circles, with particular attention to those who were most involved with English foreign policy. Both Beale and Rogers were repeatedly engaged in diplomatic missions to the continent. Rogers was increasingly relied upon by the Elizabethan government for his Danish contacts and expertise, particularly in the 1580s when King Frederik II had a heightened role in maintaining peace at home and supporting Protestants in the Low Countries and France. Frederick’s death in 1588 led to a pressing need for updated information; both authors were knowingly responding to real political opportunity, filling “a void in English intelligence” (219). As well as having clear echoes of the Venetian relation, Roger’s discourse may also have been related to printed works on the art of travel.

Early modern travel was an opportunity for self-development and education, yet before the formalization of the Grand Tour tradition in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, gathering information for oneself or for the state could become blurred, and the complementary nature of the relazione and the ars apodemica text can perhaps be seen as both a symptom and a cause. Gehring details the various printed works on the art of travel that first appeared in the 1570s, initially in German-speaking lands, dwelling on a short volume written by Albrecht Meyer under the direction of Danish stadholder Heinrich Rantzau, which presented concise and direct travel advice covering the topics with which we are now familiar. Gehring raises the intriguing possibility that Rogers himself may have brought the volume back to England for translation, if he had been gifted it by Rantzau during his 1588 embassy to Denmark, noting that unlike the Latin edition the translation recommends its audience to detail royal alliances—something that would perhaps have been less accessible to

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6 Gehring provides the full references as follows: Methodus Describendi regiones, orbis & arces, & quid singulis locis praepice in peregrinationibus honores nobilium ac duci animaduertere, observare & annotare debant (Helmstedt, 1587), VD16 M 2301; expanded as Methodus Apodemica, seu Peregriandi, Perlestrandique regionis, orbis & arces ratio (Leipzig, 1588), VD16 M 2302; translated and further expanded in Philip Jones, Certaine briefe, and special Instructions for Gentlemen, merchants, students, soldiers, mariners, &c. Employed in services abroad, or any way occasioned to converse in the kingdoms, and governments of foreign Princes (London, 1589), STC 17784.
the gentlemen traveler initially envisaged. Gehring thus presents Rogers’s discourse as a bridge between the
relazione and the ars apodemica, as the tradition grew and expanded.

It is not necessarily clear how far Gehring suspects that Rogers’s potential involvement in the translation
could be a contributing factor to the merging of the two written traditions, rather than simply symptomatic of
an existing similarity, and of course without further evidence the connection must remain an at any rate
appealing possibility. What it clearly and neatly demonstrates is the close affinity between these forms of
informational text. He concludes that the difference between the genres is centered on audience, recognizing
that the newly public nature of this type of instruction meant that the aspirational traveler could seek to join
the fray, responding to the needs of government in an attempt to gain patronage and secure appointment. It
is worth noting that the authors of the two discourses discussed were not what we might think of as
gentlemen travelers at the time. Though Beale was not securely in the employ of state when he wrote his
discourse, he was accompanying the official ambassador and had already acted as part of an ambassadorial
retinue under Henry Norris in France, while Rogers was a well-established diplomatic figure in 1588. So while
we can understand the conjunction of these written traditions as opening up the gathering of intelligence to
“those outside the government entirely” (212), this element of the independent traveler becoming involved in
news gathering is not pursued in depth. Gehring’s compelling account of the informational landscape of
diplomacy and travel in early modern Europe offers much to recommend it, and his argument is persuasive
and engaging. The twin case studies of the Beale and Rogers discourses provide vital, in-depth examples of
how this landscape could be navigated for oneself and for one’s country, and the connection between the
“Discourse…of Denmark” and Meyer’s book is both highly appealing and neatly indicative of the synergy
between the formal relation and the ars apodemica tradition.

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biases of digital archives and their early modern antecedents, particularly as regards the English State Papers;
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practices of diplomatic and intelligencing figures under Elizabeth I, before turning to the loaded afterlives of
those letters across the early modern and digital archive.