

Gestures of Conciliation: Peacemaking Endeavors in the Latin East

Yvonne Friedman

In principle, medieval Muslims and Christians alike believed that the encounter between them should be restricted to Holy War.¹ Nonetheless, the period from 1098 to 1291 was in actuality punctuated by peaceful contacts and interludes of varying length, as Jean Richard has shown.² Indeed, some 120 treaties are attested for the period.³ However, following the focus of the chronicles, research has been channelled more to the history of crusader warfare than to peacemaking efforts, notwithstanding Peter Holt's work on Mamluk treaties and Michael Köhler's work on the Seljuqs and Ayyubids.⁴ Among historians of the crusades and the Latin East, Professor Kedar is exceptional for directing attention to the extra-battlefield relations between the enemies and the resultant cultural convergence that emerged from their encounter in the East. Here, I build on his groundbreaking research to examine the function of gestures as bearers of better- or less-understood cultural messages in Christian-Muslim contacts, during, and in the aftermath of, battle.

In the quest to track medieval peace processes, the conspicuous absence of treaty texts makes reliance on literary sources like chronicles imperative. Treaties and their terms must be viewed as an outcome of a more complex process, which in the Latin East underwent a shift from informal mediation to formal diplomacy; at both ends of the spectrum, gestural language constituted an essential component. As is the case for religious beliefs and mores, both parties to the Muslim-Christian conflict had their own heritage of symbolic nonverbal language.

Symbolic behaviour played an unusually significant role in Christian-Muslim negotiations during the two-hundred-year history of the Latin kingdom. It is to be understood in the context of the overall importance of symbols of power in the Middle Ages, especially in the case of encounters between enemies who often shared no common language and had to bridge a wide gap of religious and cultural differences. Whereas polyglot mediators and translators could overcome linguistic problems, the deep mistrust stemming from different cultural concepts had to be

¹ Tomas Mastnak, *Crusading Peace: Christendom, the Muslim World, and Western Political Order* (Berkeley, 2002); Rudolph Peters, trans., "The Chapter on Jihad from Averroes' Legal handbook *Bidāyat al-Mudjtahid*," *Jihad in Medieval and Modern Islam*, Nisaba, vol. 5 (Leiden, 1977).

² Jean Richard, *The Crusades: c.1071–c.1291*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1999), p. 294.

³ Yvonne Friedman, "Peace and Peacemaking Processes between Christians and Muslims in the Medieval Latin East," forthcoming.

⁴ Peter M. Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy (1260–1290): Treaties of Baybars and Qalawun with Christian Rulers* (Leiden, 1995); Michael A. Köhler, *Allianzen und Verträge zwischen fränkischen und islamischen Herrschern im Vorderen Orient: Eine Studie über das zwischenstaatliche Zusammenleben von 12. bis ins 13. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1991).

bridged by symbolic acts – usually rituals of power – for all to see and understand. These gesture-based rituals could initiate, facilitate or seal negotiations.

Anthropologists using history, or historians using anthropological paradigms, have found the medieval period an especially fertile field of research. This is particularly so because of the prominence of symbolical rituals in political events.⁵ Yet a caveat is necessary here. Philippe Buc has warned historians playing with theories about medieval rituals that there can be no anthropological readings of rituals depicted in medieval texts, only anthropological readings of medieval textual practices or medieval practices reconstructed by the historian using text, with full sensitivity to its status as text.⁶ Thus, any use of medieval descriptions must be guided by the question of what their authors thought about events that historians identify as ritual, and why and from what perspective these authors recorded these rituals.

Vital to the peacemaking process in the Latin East, whose protagonists came with divergent, actual and symbolic traditions, was the reaching of a common language and the erosion of cultural barriers. A shared or learned language of gesture as well as formal mediation by diplomats conversant with both languages and cultures comprise an inseparable part of the phenomenon described here. Obviously, in the context of the Latin East it was often necessary to discover a way to bridge immediately the differences between the divergent traditions. When the treaties were in fact pacts of surrender or payment of tribute, as was the case in many of the earlier agreements, it may have been easier for the crusaders to accept local usage, which was to their benefit. When mutual termination of hostilities was involved, mistrust and cultural disparities surfaced more strongly.

Clearly, the battlefield was one venue in which there was a pressing need for universally understood gestures, as a way to end hostilities and initiate negotiations. One had to give an unmistakable sign of wanting to cease conflict, a universally and quickly understood sign, like the modern raising of a white flag or raising both arms – which symbolize not holding any weapons. Medieval soldiers apparently had their own gestural language, which, although not always obvious to us, must have been clear to them. In the following example from 1150, a Syrian soldier used gestural language to convey a message to the Latin army during the Latin retreat from the territory of Edessa. Having given over their last holdings to the Byzantines, the Latins were under attack from the army of Nur al-Din following their retreat:

The Turks, overcome with wonder at the incomparable perseverance of the Christians, now ceased to follow our army.

Humphrey, the constable, armed with his bow, was pursuing the retreating infidels a little apart from the army when a soldier from the enemy's rank approached him.

⁵ David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (New Haven, 1988), p. 12; Gerd Althoff, *Spielregeln der Politik. Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde* (Darmstadt, 1997), pp. 126–53.

⁶ Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Rituals: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, 2001), Introduction, pp. 1–15.

Laying down his arms, he clasped his hands, first on one side, then on the other, in sign of reverence (repositis armis et iunctis alternatim ad latus minibus signum exhibens reverentie). He was a confidential retainer of a very powerful Turkish noble who was bound to the constable in a fraternal alliance and that very closely. This man had been sent to greet Humphrey and to inform him of conditions in the hostile army. He reported that Nur al-Din intended to return with his army to his own land that very night, for all the provisions in his camp were exhausted and he could not pursue the Christians farther.⁷

According to William of Tyre, this *miles* had engaged in diplomatic relations with the kingdom's constable before, so there must have been a background of mutual understanding that made Humphrey put down his bow. That is the first, simple level of the gesture described here. Yet, it seems odd that Nur al-Din had any need to report his situation or plans to the enemy. It appears that the larger purpose of conveying this information was as part of a conciliatory agreement to end the skirmishing on both sides. William, who knew with hindsight that the sad exodus was in fact the end of Christian rule of Turbessel, and that the region would shortly fall to Nur al-Din, thought it important to emphasize the enemy's appreciation for the Latins' steadfast march; the enemy had no such awe of the "effeminate Greeks." Although the hand-clasping gesture was clear to both protagonists, it was apparently rather unusual, as William found it necessary to describe the details. Suggestive of modern football players showing appreciation for a goal, performed with raised hands, it seems that it not only signified the laying down of weapons, but also appreciation, a prelude to agreement. Other battlefield gestures, such as giving the banner to the vanquished as a sign of protection, or grasping the victor's legs to arouse his pity, as elaborated in the conquest of Jerusalem by the First Crusade,⁸ did not lead to negotiation or treaties and did not in fact prove effective.

Gesture also played a significant role in diplomatic contacts in the wake of military engagements. Indeed, even if treaty terms have not survived in the Latin East, the chroniclers have preserved details of gesture-rich diplomatic encounters and ceremonies, and there is also pictorial evidence for peacemaking or diplomatic encounters between the parties.⁹ On the one hand, gestural language belongs to the sphere of natural human behaviour and some of its aspects, like gestures of humility – bowing, kneeling, and prostration – have universal signification.¹⁰ Similarly,

⁷ William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, ed. Robert B.C. Huygens, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 63, 63a (Turnhout, 1981). Trans. Emily Atwater Babcock and A.C. Krey as *A History of Deeds Done beyond the Sea* (New York, 1943), 17.17.

⁸ For the different descriptions of the conquest of Jerusalem, see Benjamin Z. Kedar, "The Jerusalem Massacre of July 1099 in the Western Historiography of the Crusades," *Crusades* 3 (2004), 15–75.

⁹ For the use of illuminations as historical text, see Michael Camille, "Art History in the Past and Future of Medieval Studies," *The Past and Future of Medieval Studies*, ed. John Van Engen (Notre Dame, 1994), pp. 363–82.

¹⁰ "To place oneself beneath another person is clearly a sign of inferiority. Indeed this meaning is so widespread among social mammals that one wonders if it does not have some common source, perhaps in their perception of space or in the reinforcement of dependent, infantile behaviour. Nevertheless, the kind of inferiority a prostration represents is not inherent in the physical act. Still less does the act

the relationship between rank and any difference in elevation was known to, and understood by, both sides. As we shall see, other gestures were culture-specific, and their signification had to be learned. By way of background, I begin with one of the first documented efforts at peaceful contacts or negotiations by the crusaders in the Latin East, which demonstrates the mediator's role. It took place outside Antioch in 1098, when the crusader council decided to negotiate with Kerbogha of Mosul, who had laid siege to their newly conquered city. Taking the evidence of the *Gesta Francorum* at face value, the mediators chosen, Peter the Hermit and Herluin the translator, were hardly suitable. Tact was not one of Peter's main characteristics, and while the holy hermit may have been a prominent figure in the crusader camp, he cannot have been regarded as such by Muslim-Turkish standards. Although they used an interpreter, not surprisingly, the mission failed.¹¹

Albert of Aachen provides an example of a more successful encounter, in which the transmission of pertinent knowledge helped to bridge the cultural gap. After the crusader victory at Antioch in 1098, the ruler of 'Azaz in Syria received the following advice from one of his knights, who had married a crusader captive: "Now if you will trust my advice you will waste no time *making* Godfrey, duke of the Christian army..., *your friend with right hands pledged.*"¹² Although the prince, says Albert, recognized this advice as sensible, he chose to proceed via the diplomatic channels and usage with which he was familiar: "He sent a messenger of the Christian faith, a Syrian by race, a wonderfully eloquent man, to Duke Godfrey at Antioch." After presenting himself and praising Godfrey, he delivered an oral message: "We are speaking to you, we request assistance of you, we are making a treaty with this assurance by which you may be certain of having our trust always. Ridvan of the state of Aleppo has become our enemy... And I have decided not to meet and resist him with any assistance of the Turkish princes, but to put our defence in your hands, if you do not refuse to trust me and to help." Godfrey let it be known through messengers that he did not trust the prince's intentions. The latter decided to proceed a step further and to give his son Muhammad as a hostage, a diplomatic guarantee familiar to, and accepted, by both sides. According to Albert, the treaty was then signed "with an enduring vow" and a promise of assistance.¹³

convey any information about the world. They are explained in the cultural framework through their analogies with similar liturgical gestures (as one knelt before God or saints)." Geoffrey Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor: Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, 1992), p. 301.

¹¹ *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum: The Deeds of the Franks and Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*, ed. Rosalind Hill (London, 1962), p. 66.

¹² Albert of Aachen, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, ed. and trans. Susan B. Edgington, Oxford Medieval Texts (forthcoming), 5.7 (earlier edition, *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades Occidentaux IV* [Paris, 1879]).

¹³ Albert of Aachen, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, Cf. William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, 7.3: "...servitium suum cum devotionem spondit, indissolubili nexu federis ei se cupiens obligare. Et ut verbis eius planiorem haberet fidem et nulla ex parte de eius promisso dubitaret, filium suum eum destinat obsidem, orans et petens ut a presenti eum solvat periculo, condignam pro meritis tempore oportuno retributionem percepturus." Cf. Esther Pascua, "South of the Pyrenees: Kings, Magnates and Political Bargaining in Twelfth-century Spain," *Journal of Medieval History* 27 (2001), 101–20, which cites terms used in

The use of diplomatic mediators, conversant with the language and religion of the other side, was a convention of Muslim-Byzantine diplomacy for centuries before the crusaders' arrival,¹⁴ and to 'Umar of 'Azaz, that must have seemed the safest and most efficacious way to proceed. In this instance, the advice of a cultural mediator, the captive wife of his knight, was not fully heeded, perhaps due to the unfamiliarity of the gesture of extending the right hand. But she was able to indicate who should be approached. The manner in which the information was exchanged is, however, typical of relations between Latin Christians and Muslims in the East. Highborn captives were often employed as diplomats, utilizing in negotiation the linguistic tools and cultural knowledge acquired in captivity.¹⁵ Moreover, giving hostages was a well-known guarantee in both the West and in the East and, in this case, was the chosen means for bridging the gulf of mistrust.¹⁶

After the Franks fulfilled their promise to assist the ruler of 'Azaz, the treaty was renewed in the sight of three hundred knights. One feature of this ceremony was Duke Godfrey's bestowal of "a helmet marvellously inlaid with gold and silver and a hauberk of great beauty" on Prince 'Umar of Azaz. This unmistakably western description (found also in Spain) has Godfrey confirming the treaty as he would have with a vassal. In eastern diplomacy the exchange of gifts usually constituted a preliminary stage in negotiations, but 'Umar could hardly have resented the western usage in this case.¹⁷ Writing almost a century later than Albert, William of Tyre adds further details, even depicting 'Umar as giving the feudal oath of fidelity, "The prince knelt on the ground and with bowed head, returned thanks, first to the duke and then to the other chiefs...and gave the oath of fidelity...and obedience (*prono capite, defixis in terris genibus...fidelem obligavit et tradidit*),"¹⁸ whereas Albert has him swear friendship and love. It is no simple matter to decide which descriptions reflect actual practice and which reflect the chroniclers' perception of what the gesture of receiving gifts meant in the feudal society.

In the East, the usual procedures for treaty making included bowing, kneeling, and the bringing of gifts, generally performed not by the ruler himself, but by a

Spanish treaties: "confederatio et amicitia, pacem et veram amicitiam, pax et concordia, bonam fidem et convenientia...contra omnes" (ibid., p. 113).

¹⁴ John Haldon, "'Blood and Ink': Some Observations on Byzantine Attitudes towards Warfare and Diplomacy," *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Aldershot, 1992), pp. 281–94; idem, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204* (London, 1999).

¹⁵ Yvonne Friedman, *Encounter between Enemies: Captivity and Ransom in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 117–18.

¹⁶ Adam J. Kosto, "Hostages during the First Century of the Crusades," *Medieval Encounters* 9, 1 (2003), 3–31.

¹⁷ Raymond of Aguilers (Raymond d'Aguilers, *Le 'Liber' de Raymond d'Aguilers*, ed. John Hugh and Laurita L. Hill [Paris, 1969], p. 88) claims that Godfrey took hostages from the castle as guarantors of future loyalty. Kamal al-Din (writing in the thirteenth century) describes the revolt of 'Umar, the summoning of Frankish allies, the retreat of the Aleppan army and the giving of 'Umar's son as hostage (Kamal al-Din ibn al-'Adim, "Zubdat al-halab fi ta'rikh Halab", *Recueil des historiens des croisades, Historiens orientaux* (Paris, 1872–1906), iii:595).

¹⁸ William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, 7.4.

proxy, his messenger. A messenger sent to the Byzantine court or the court of the 'Abbasid caliph was expected to kiss the ground in front of the ruler, to bow, and to kneel. Acceptance of his gifts was seen as a sign of favour, and he was, as a rule, not allowed any physical contact with the ruler.¹⁹ In the above-cited story of the treaty with 'Umar of 'Azaz one can discern some basic elements also found in additional peacemaking encounters: (1) the importance of the clasping of the right hand, unfamiliar to the eastern ruler and essential to the westerner; (2) bowing and kneeling, apparently meaningful to both sides; (3) oath taking, a guarantee essential to both sides; (4) the assurance of hostages; and (5) gifts given as part of the diplomatic exchange. All or some of these elements appear intertwined in the different diplomatic encounters. The remainder of this paper focuses on only two of these features – the right hand and the bestowing of gifts.

A telling example of the role of gestures comes from William of Tyre's account of the treaty contracted between the Frankish king Amalric and the Fatimid vizier Shavar in 1167, which was ratified by the young Fatimid caliph al-'Adid. Note the central role of extending the right hand; naturally, this was but one of the many gestures utilized:

These terms met with the approval of both parties, and in token of his agreement to the treaty the king extended his *right hand* (*dexteram dedit*) to the caliph's representatives. At the same time, however, he sent Hugh of Caesarea, a young man of admirable wisdom and discretion (*circumspectus*) far beyond his years, with several others to obtain the caliph's ratification of the covenant by the *hand* of Hugh (*in cuius manu calipha iuxta consonantiam placitam pacta firmaret*), according to the stipulations agreed upon; for the sultan's guarantee alone in this matter seemed insufficient.²⁰

The ceremony of extending the right hand is done here by proxy, by the mediator, the noble diplomat Hugh of Caesarea. In this instance the Franks were clearly the stronger party, as proven by the large sum Shavar was willing to pay as tribute, of which half was paid immediately.²¹ Frankish primacy is attested by their ability to force the caliph to accept their gestures of treaty-making:

The Christians then requested that the caliph confirm this statement with his own *hand* as the king had done. At first, the courtiers who surrounded him, as well as his counsellors and gentlemen of the chamber... were shocked at the suggestion, as a thing utterly beyond comprehension. Finally, however, after long deliberation, at the persistent urging of the sultan, he very reluctantly extended his *hand* covered. Then, to the consternation of the Egyptians, who were amazed that anyone should talk so freely to their supreme lord, Hugh of Caesarea said to him: "Sire, good faith has nothing to conceal, but when princes bind themselves together in true loyalty everything ought to be open; and everything which is inserted in good faith in any pact should be confirmed or refused with frank

¹⁹ Cf. al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, 34, trans. Joel L. Kraemer (Albany 1989), pp. 165–68.

²⁰ William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, 19.17.

²¹ Yaacov Lev, *Saladin in Egypt* (Leiden, 1999), p. 58, citing the Mamluk historian Nuwayri (1279–1332).

sincerity. Therefore, unless you offer your *bare hand* we shall be obliged to think that, on your part, there is some reservation or lack of sincerity.”²²

Although courteous, Hugh left no doubt as to who was dictating the terms. William of Tyre, himself a diplomat on occasion and very aware of the importance of etiquette, describes the scene with obvious relish, consistently highlighting the difference between the diplomatic usage of the different sides: “Finally, with extreme unwillingness, as if it detracted from his majesty, yet with a slight smile, which greatly aggrieved the Egyptians, he put his *uncovered hand* into that of Hugh. He repeated, almost syllable by syllable, the words of Hugh as he dictated the formula of the treaty and swore that he would keep the stipulations thereof in good faith, without fraud or evil intent.”²³ William of Tyre’s triumphant tone was apparently based on the description given by Hugh himself.²⁴ “Twisting the caliph’s arm” by forcing him to extend his bare right hand, as well as to repeat the formula dictated by the Christian side, was clearly seen as a diplomatic victory for the Franks.

In describing oaths of cooperation between Christian participants in the crusades, Albert of Aachen depicts the use of the practice of giving the right hand several times.²⁵ Although clearly predominant there, the gesture of giving the right hand was not limited exclusively to western usage. In cases of treaties between enemies, extending the right hand represents a gesture of trust, indicating the placing of one’s strength in the hands of the other side. At the same time, it has the connotation of a solemn oath. A third, connected meaning of this gesture, frequently used by Albert, is surrender: giving the right hand as a sign of submission by an individual or a city, or as a captive’s signal that he no longer poses a threat to the captor.²⁶ The pre-eminence of the right hand was known in Arab and Muslim culture as well,²⁷

²² William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, 19.17.

²³ William of Tyre, *Chronicon*, 19.19: “Petentibus igitur nostris ut hoc propria manu firmaret, sicut dominus rex fecerat, prima facie visi sunt qui ei familiarius astabant auriculares et cubicularii, penes quos consiliorum regionum erat auctoritas, rem nimis tanquam a seculis inauditam abhorrere, tandem vero, post multam deliberationem et soldani diligentiam instantiam, manum porrigit invitus nimium, sed velatam. Cui predictus Hugo de Cesarea, multum admirantibus et stupentibus Egyptiis quod tam libere summo principe loqueretur, dixit: ‘Domine, fides angulos non habet, sed in fide media, per quam se obligare solent principes, omnia debent esse nuda et aperta et cum sinceritate et colligari et solvi convenit universa, que fidei interpositione pactis quibuslibet inseruntur: propterea aut nudam dabis, aut fictum aliquid et minus puritatis habens ex parti tua cogemur opinari.’ Tunc demum invitus plurimum et quasi maiestati detrahens, subridens tamen, quod multum egre tulerunt Egyptii dexteram suam in manum domini Hugonis nudam prebuit, eundem Hugonem, pactorem formam determinantem, eisdem pene sillabis sequens, tenorem conventorum bona fide, sine fraude et malo ingenio se observaturum contestans.”

²⁴ William declined to mention the part of another messenger, the Templar.

²⁵ Albert of Aachen, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, 1.5, 3.13, 4.16.

²⁶ Albert of Aachen, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, 3.11 (clasping right hands; cf. the ceremony of *homagium*); 6.32, 9.6, 10.14, 11.13, 11.17.

²⁷ Joseph Chelhod, “Pre-eminence of the Right: Based upon Arabic Evidence,” *Right and Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification*, ed. Rodney Needham (Chicago, 1973), pp. 239–62.

but in the east, physical contact with a ruler was a special sign of grace. Therefore, for the caliph, being forced to give his hand was indeed humiliating.²⁸

The two treaties referred to above, a half-century apart, were both treaties of military cooperation against a Muslim rival. This, however, was not the most frequent type of agreement in the Latin East, where most treaties were contracted to end war between the enemy sides, further accentuating the lack of trust. The language barrier that usually existed between the belligerents enhanced the importance of readily comprehensible symbolic gestures like gift-giving, or kneeling and bowing.

In September 1192, during the protracted negotiations for a *hudna* between Richard I of England and Saladin, this basically western usage of extending the right hand to seal a treaty is attributed to both sides. Thus Baha al-Din claims that Richard, who was too sick to read the draft, said: “I have no strength to read this, but I herewith make peace and here is my hand,” and that Saladin said to the Christian envoys: “If you can accept these terms, well and good. I give you my hand on it.”²⁹ Thus, according to the Muslim chronicler, this gesture had become part of the conventions of treaty-making on both sides. It seems then that a process of mutual acculturation had taken place in the period since Godfrey’s meeting with ‘Umar of ‘Azaz.

Illustrations provide another source for deciphering the gestures of peace. Matthew Paris’ illustration of the treaty between the ruler of Karak and Richard of Cornwall in 1240 is a veritable mine of information.³⁰ (See Fig. 1.) In it, the two leaders themselves meet – an unusual occurrence in the East – midway between their strongholds, which reflects the usual practice of treaty making on neutral ground, attested in Muslim–Christian treaties in Spain,³¹ but not in the East where Saladin twice refused to meet Richard I of England and sent messengers instead. But Baha al-Din’s theoretical description of a meeting between his master and Richard of Cornwall provides exactly this *mise-en-scène*: “The meeting should take place on the plain with their troops surrounding the two of them.”³² Their armed troops watch from a distance. More pertinent to our theme, both sides kneel and give their right hands. Note, however, the differences in the kneeling gesture. According to John Burrow, kneeling on one knee preserves some honour, unlike the bowing gesture that signifies surrender.³³ They remove their helmets and touch shields, all trust-enhancing gestures meant to show that one is placing his safety in the adversary’s

²⁸ Cf. Baha al-Din’s description of Saladin’s modest behaviour: “Whenever the sultan shook hands with someone he would not let go his hand until that person had taken the initiative to do so” *The Rare and Excellent History of Saladin by Baha al-Din Ibn Shadad*, trans. Donald S. Richards (Aldershot 2001), p. 35.

²⁹ Baha al-Din, *History*, pp. 229, 230–31.

³⁰ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 16, Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, fol. 139v.

³¹ Robert I. Burns and Paul E. Chevedden, *Negotiating Cultures: Bilingual Surrender Treaties in Muslim-Crusader Spain under James the Conqueror* (Leiden, 1999).

³² Baha al-Din, *History*, p. 156.

³³ John A. Burrow, *Gestures and Looks in Medieval Narrative*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Narrative 48 (Cambridge, 2002), p. 19.



Fig. 1 Richard of Cornwall signing a treaty with the ruler of Crac. Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 16, fol. 139v. Reproduced courtesy of the Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, England.

hands. As we have seen, some of the gestures found here have textual attestation. Undoubtedly both sides were aware of their importance and their signification.³⁴

By way of contrast, the miniature showing the citizens of Edessa accepting Baldwin I as their ruler (Fig. 2),³⁵ painted in Acre toward the end of Frankish rule, reflects a more eastern usage: Baldwin receives the Edessan representatives seated on a throne and flanked by armed guards. Unlike a western ceremony of homage, the citizens approach him from a distance, kneel bareheaded, and bear gifts. Baldwin's lifted hand with its raised finger means attentiveness and shows his readiness to listen and to speak to them. Significantly, no physical contact takes place. Similarly, the illustrations for the *Maqamat al-Hariri* show the narrator and his friend Abu Zayd approaching eminent personages – in one instance a qadi, in the other a ruler.³⁶ (See Fig. 3.) In both of these instances, rank is clearly defined by

³⁴ When Richard II of England came to France in 1396 to marry Isabella, both kings bared their heads, bowed “a little” and took each other by the hand. When people hold out a hand or take somebody by the hand, this is not the same as shaking hands; that is a later gesture showing equality. Thus Wat Tiler (1381 revolt) shook hands with King Richard, which was seen as insulting. The French chronicler describes a clasp – “il prist le roy par la mayne” – but has only an English word for the defiantly gesture “et schaka sa brace durement et fortement.” See Raymond Firth, “Verbal and Bodily Rituals of Greeting and Parting,” *The Interpretation of Ritual* (London, 1972), pp. 1–38, especially p. 37.

³⁵ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 9084, fol. 42r. Published by Hugo Buchthal, *Miniature Painting in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Oxford, 1957), plate 136c. Similar illuminations depict Tancred receiving tribute from local satraps. Reproduced by courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

³⁶ *Maqamat al-Hariri*, London, British Library, MS Add 22114, fols. 66r and. 18v. Cf. *Maqamat al Hariri*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS 5847, facsimile, fol. 26r.



Fig. 2 Turkish and Armenian satraps offering gifts to obtain a treaty. William of Tyre, *History of Outremer* (Old French translation), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 9084, fol. 42r. Reproduced courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

elevation. The ruler is seated, whereas the approaching protagonists stand lower, bowing forward slightly with an extended hand, but, again, in no way touching the more exalted personage. These two types of ceremony – the first western and the second eastern – are corroborated in medieval chronicles, particularly ones penned by diplomats.³⁷

Hands play a role in the ratification of Baybars's treaty with the Latin kingdom in 1268 as described by Muhyi al-din Ibn 'Abd al-Zahir (1223–93), the head of the royal chancery under Baybars and Qalawun, and a court biographer:

I was an ambassador together with the Amir Kamal al-Din b. Shith to take the king's oath. The sultan sent us with the gift of twenty of the prisoners of Antioch, priests and monks. We entered Acre on 24 Shawwal (7 July 1268) and were received by a numerous gathering. The sultan had instructed us not to demean ourselves before [the king] in sitting or speech. When we entered to him, we saw him sitting enthroned together with the masters [of the Orders] and we would not take our seat until a throne was placed for

³⁷ Baha al-Din's detailed description of the ceremonial aspects of the treaty between Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in 1192 includes the "taking of hands" (*History*, p. 231). He also relates a delay in the oath-taking ceremony, attributed to the fact that the Christians "do not take an oath after eating" and that they had eaten that day. Perhaps this was a way of gaining time to convince Richard to sign the treaty. The mediators were apparently successful in setting international policy behind the backs of the rulers who had sent them to negotiate in their name.



Fig. 3 Abu Zayd appealing to the governor, *Maqamat al-Hariri*, British Library, London, MS Add. 22114, fol. 66r. Reproduced courtesy of the British Library, London.

us opposite him. The *wazir* put out the hand to take the letter, but we would not hand it over until the king put out his hand and took it.³⁸

To my mind, Peter Holt's suggestion that Baybars's messengers' insistence on Hugh de Lusignan accepting their message with his own hand is in deliberate retribution for the 1167 meeting between Hugh of Caesarea and the Caliph al-'Adid exaggerates the fame William's story had acquired.³⁹ It should rather be seen as yet another example of different, or clashing cultural symbols and rituals. Like their instructions not to sit lower than the king, the messengers' behaviour was probably meant as an affront to the king. Whether connected to the former incident a century earlier or not, to the Mamluk envoys, placing the letter in the king's hand was insulting, whereas it was normal Western practice, portrayed in numerous illuminations showing envoys to the Byzantine emperor holding on to the same letter he accepts.⁴⁰ (See Fig. 4.) In the eyes of the eastern report by Shafi ibn Ali the envoys' gesture and the speech were so insolent that they prompted Hugh to threaten them with force. In the eyes of the West, it was their words that provoked the king's anger.

Thus, each of the parties to the Christian–Muslim conflict in the Latin East brought a different understanding to gestures involving hands, the right hand in particular. If in some cases, the cultural gap was overcome by explanation, or by a not-so-subtle application of force, when Saladin and Richard I of England engaged in negotiations, some mutual understanding and shared use of hand gestures had been achieved.

Gifts were another important feature of medieval negotiations, and of non-hostile relations, in both East and West. Indeed, gifts in the medieval west have recently been described as of “central importance...in the articulation of any non-hostile relationship at the time. An accord is inconceivable without the attendant gifts to cement it. No association could possibly be established unless it was viewed in terms of gifts, generosity and acceptance.”⁴¹ In eastern practice, on the other hand, gifts were normally given by the party seeking to initiate negotiations, which, at least in theory, was the weaker side. In the case of the gift made by Godfrey to the ruler of 'Azaz, this condescending largesse on Godfrey's part seals the treaty, emphasizing the inequality between the sides. Jean Starobinski sees the gift as ruinous because of the inequality it entails, and claims that “there is only one antidote to this deleterious role: the contract, which is a relation of power, but a

³⁸ Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, p. 70.

³⁹ Holt, *Early Mamluk Diplomacy*, p. 70 n. 4.

⁴⁰ See, for example, the illuminations depicting messengers to the Byzantine emperor and those on the Becket leaves. See Boulogne sur Mer, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 142, fol. 60v; Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, MS Plu. LXI, 10, fol. 70v; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 9084, fol. 272r, and the Becket leaves, now at the British Library, depicting the messenger to the pope and to Becket..

⁴¹ Esther Cohen, “Introduction,” *Medieval Transformations: Texts, Power and Gifts in Context*, ed. Esther Cohen and Mayke B. de Jong (Leiden, 2001), p. 7.



Fig. 4 The Byzantine Emperor receiving a letter from a messenger, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 9084, fol. 272r. Reproduced courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

relation nonetheless.⁴² There is, however, another well-known gesture in the East that may have made it easier for the ruler of 'Azaz to accept the gift, namely, the bestowing of honour or investiture by giving a robe of honour.⁴³ Not used as such by the laity in the West, it perhaps served nevertheless as a meeting point between the different cultural concepts.

As noted, the bringing of gifts belonged to the gestural sphere of diplomacy-initiating encounters in the East. In Fig. 2 we see the oriental satraps bringing Baldwin horses and gold. This could, of course, have been part of the treaty itself:

⁴² Jean Starobinski, *Largesse*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago, 1997), p. vii.

⁴³ See Stewart Gordon (ed.), *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture* The New Middle Ages (Houndmills, 2001) for a comparative study in the east and west.

tribute paid for an armistice or truce, a usual and very useful way of conducting affairs in the first decade of the Latin rule in the East. Bringing gifts as a trust-enhancing gesture was part and parcel of negotiations in the East, a longstanding procedure in Byzantine-Muslim parleys. These gifts could be prominent captives – separate and apart from the large bulk of captive exchanges being negotiated – or a costly gift, fit for a ruler, or even a special dish. The crusader ruler seated on a throne very similar to that of the Byzantine emperor, the world superpower of the East in Frankish eyes, who receives gifts from bowing or kneeling messengers, is obviously a manifestation of power and might. Nonetheless, I think the illuminators here truthfully depict the oriental mode of peace gestures: bringing tribute and humbly asking for peace. From the oriental perspective, gift-giving carried only a meaning of initiating negotiations.

The rejection of gifts sent by Baybars to initiate negotiations by the besieged garrison at Safad in 1266 led to a violent counter-reaction: after conquering the city, Baybars executed all the Templars.⁴⁴ In describing the event, the Templar of Tyre writes that Baybars sent the Templars in the castle a gift, “after the custom of the Saracens,” in this case evidently failing to evoke any trust. The men in the castle used mangonels to hurl the gifts back and this made the sultan swear that he would put them all to the sword. In the West, on the other hand, gifts marked the culmination of the agreement-reaching process, and usually signified the hierarchical relationship between the parties – the more prominent side gave a gift to the lesser. Not to accept was tantamount to effrontery, if not a declaration of war.

Following Marcel Mauss’s *Essai sur le don*,⁴⁵ anthropologists emphasize the need for reciprocity in gift-giving. As it creates some sort of obligation on the part of the recipient, it is sometimes a dubious blessing. In the words of Arnoud-Jan A. Bijsterveld:

Gift exchange is defined as a transaction to create, maintain or restore relations between individuals or groups of people. The reciprocity is an essential element of this exchange. A gift has the capacity to create those relationships, because the initial gift obliges the recipient to return some other gift in the future. Because of the counter-gift, gift-giving is not restricted to one occasion: *do ut des*, it is an episode in a continuous social relationship. Gifts and counter-gifts, landed property, money, objects, brides and oblates act as a means of social integration.⁴⁶

In the encounter between enemies, gift-giving can work to initiate talks or to seal a mutual obligation, according to cultural background. Here too, as with right

⁴⁴ The Templar of Tyre, *Cronaca del Templare di Tiro*, ed. Laura Minervini (Naples, 2000), p. 108.

⁴⁵ Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don, forme archaïque de l'échange*, in *Sociologie et Anthropologie* (1925), trans. Ian Cunnison, *The Gift* (London, 1966).

⁴⁶ Arnoud-Jan A. Bijsterveld, “The Medieval Gift as Agent of a Social Bonding and Political Power: A Comparative Approach,” *Medieval Transformations*, ed. Cohen and de Jong (Leiden, 2001), pp. 123–56.

hands, Richard I of England exemplifies what I see as a process of acculturation. When al-'Adil initiated peace negotiations by sending Richard "seven valuable camels and an excellent tent," Richard was severely criticized for accepting the gifts.⁴⁷ Later, when Richard wanted to initiate talks with Saladin, he sent him two falcons, specifying what he would like in return, although it is not clear if these were really meant as a gift or as a pretext to spy on the enemy.⁴⁸

The falcon, a hunting bird, was in and of itself a symbol of peace, as hunting was the favourite pastime for non-belligerent warriors among both the eastern and western nobility. Hunting – the use of arms outside the battlefield – symbolized peaceful encounters, somewhat similar to modern sports. This can be shown, for example, by the Bayeux tapestry where a herald rides with a falcon on his shoulder to prove his peaceful intentions.⁴⁹ Usamah ibn Munqid's colourful description of the two rivals Amir Mu'in-al-Din and King Fulk of Jerusalem hunting together conveys the same meaning.⁵⁰ Thus, if in fact carried out, Richard's gesture, which is not mentioned by the Latin sources, had dual layers of meaning. It is interesting to note that Baha al-Din claims that the gift was only accepted on the explicit condition that Richard accept a comparable present.⁵¹ At the same time al-'Adil made a point of emphasizing that the initiative had come from the English king; in other words, by oriental standards, he was the weaker party. The gift of a falcon as part of a peace treaty is further illustrated by a western illumination to William of Tyre's chronicle showing the Hungarian king returning the hostages to Godfrey of Bouillon. The two leaders clasp right hands and a falcon sits on the Hungarian king's arm, this hunting bird being a gift to seal the agreement⁵² (see Fig. 5). The importance of gifts in the eastern tradition of negotiations is further illuminated by the *Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf* (The Book of Gifts and Rarities) apparently compiled a generation

⁴⁷ *Itinerarium peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi* 4.31, trans. Helen J. Nicholson, *Chronicle of the Third Crusade* (Aldershot, 1997), p. 273; cf. Ambroise, *Estoire de la guerre sainte*, lines 7410–11, trans. Merton J. Hubert and John L. La Monte, *The Crusade of Richard Lion-Heart* (New York, 1941), p. 291.

⁴⁸ Baha al-Din, *History*, pp. 155–56: According to Baha al-Din, the king said: "It is the custom of princes when they camp close to another to exchange gifts. I have something suitable for the sultan and beg permission to convey it to him." Al-'Adil replied, "You may do that on condition that you accept a comparable present." The envoy then asks for fowls to feed the birds and al-'Adil joked, "So the king needs chicken and fowls and wishes to get them from us on this pretext." The conversation ended with al-'Adil emphasizing that the initiative for talks came from the crusaders.

⁴⁹ Wolfgang Grape, *The Bayeux Tapestry: Monument to a Norman Triumph* (Munich, 1994), p.92.

⁵⁰ "When I went in the company of al-amir Mu'in al-Din to 'Akka to the king of Franks, Fulk, son of Fulk, we saw a Genoese... He brought with him a large molted falcon. Al-amir Mu'in-al-Din asked the king to give him that falcon. The king took it with the bitch from the Genoese and gave them to al-amir Mu'in-al-Din." Usamah ibn Munqidh, *Kitāb al-ītibār*, trans. Philip. K. Hitti, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior in the Period of the Crusades: Memoirs of Usamah ibn-Munqidh* (New York, 1929), p. 226.

⁵¹ Usamah ibn Munqidh, *Kitāb al-ītibār*.

⁵² Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 9081, fol. 16v: Godfrey and King of Hungary.



Fig. 5 The King of Hungary returning hostages to Godfrey of Bouillon. William of Tyre, *History of Outremer* (Old French translation), Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS fr. 9081, fol. 16v. Reproduced courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale, Paris.

before the First Crusade.⁵³ Gifts given to Muslim rulers are carefully described, valued and detailed; there was evidently a special treasury where royal, diplomatic gifts were kept and registered.

Thus, as a gesture, gifts had multi-level meanings. They could be an expression of superiority and affluence, a trust-enhancing opening for negotiations or a sign of friendship, but they were always, as modern anthropologists have noted, a sign of relations and social contact. In sum, they represented that most important function of all the gestures discussed: a means of communication in which actions speak louder than words.

Some historians attribute the importance of gestures to the weakness of literacy. As seen from the examples discussed above, the middle ages knew both gestures and literacy, although their balance changed from one century to the next. Gestures publicly transmitted political and religious power and gave legal actions a living image. They bound together human wills and bodies.⁵⁴ In the case of intercultural encounters, gestures acquired an even more important role, acting to ratify agreement. But the fact that mediators and diplomats were needed to explain or enforce these gestures shows that they did not always function as a cultural bridge, but rather as an impediment to mutual understanding. In many cases, the language of force ruled, with the victor imposing his bodily language on the vanquished as yet another facet of inferiority, one that being public and visible carried a greater effect for propaganda than a written treaty.

In the late thirteenth century, when the Franks were the underdog, this forcible indication of primacy through gesture in diplomatic encounters finds vivid illustration. I have already noted how in 1268 the Mamluk sultan Baybars sent his emissaries to King Hugh in Acre with strict instructions not to sit below the Frankish king. The importance attached to these instructions emerges from the eastern illustrations of how a ruler is approached. When the discussion became heated, the king threatened the emissary with his troops, who stood behind him. After ascertaining whether he had a safe conduct, the emissary said, "Let the king know that in Khizanat al-Bunud, which is a prison in the sultan's realm in Cairo, there are Frankish prisoners more in number than these."⁵⁵ This answer was undoubtedly calculated as an insult to the Frankish king, showing that he had in fact no choice but to ratify the treaty and that the cessation of hostilities was in Baybars' hands. But the answer has additional implications. The safe-conduct of an emissary was part of the long-established rules in encounters between the enemies, and if violated, the prisoners in Cairo could pay for this infringement with their lives. In

⁵³ *Kitab al-Hadaya wa al-Tuhaf*, trans. Ghada al-Hijawi al-Qaddumi, *Book of Gifts and Rarities*, Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs 29 (Cambridge, Mass., 1996).

⁵⁴ Jean-Claude Schmitt, "The Language of Gestures in the West: Third to Thirteenth Centuries," *A Cultural History of Gesture*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 59–70, especially, p. 60.

⁵⁵ Holt, *Mamluk Diplomacy*, pp. 70–71; Ibn al-Furat, *Ta'rikh*, in Ursula Lyons and Malcolm C. Lyons, *Ayyubids, Mamlukes and Crusaders* 2 (Cambridge, 1971), p. 129.

other words, the Franks had to abide by the rules of exchanging captives, acquired in the Latin East, but this by no means guaranteed that Baybars would adhere to the same rules.

As the final example strikingly demonstrates, in the final analysis, the main factor underlying treaty making remained the subtle language of power. Ultimately, the victorious side dictated its verbal and gestural language to the vanquished. Although I have noted some instances in which the belligerents came to share the other side's usages and mores through a process of learning, in cases where the gap in power was prominent, gestures, as well as peace terms were often dictated, not negotiated. Even so, the means of mutual communication that developed into formal diplomacy continued to play a significant role in these adversarial encounters.

Proofs