To a modern observer, the terms ‘diplomacy’ and ‘administration’ connote very different things and are connected either with difficulty or not at all. Diplomacy involves a direct personal contact between two persons or parties, while an administrative process is regarded as an impersonal procedure in which decisions are made on record and where personal contact represents no essential element in a decision.

In the Roman world the picture is completely different, as two examples from two very different regions demonstrate. On July 25th in the year 78, a delegation of the Spanish city of Sabora appeared before Vespasian in Rome and presented to him a resolution of their council. In it they sought permission to create an urban center in the plain, that they be allowed to use the name Flavium for the municipium, and that the city’s tax revenues, which it had had since Augustan times, be confirmed. Vespasian permitted all this. Nevertheless, when the city asked that he allow new vectigalia, Vespasian refused on the grounds that he would also have to hear possible opponents of such a request (nullo respondente), which was not possible in Rome in the present circumstances. But if the inhabitants of Sabora wanted to pursue this matter further, then ‘they should approach the proconsul about it’ (‘de his proco(n)s(ulem) adire debebitis’).\(^1\)

We find this same procedure, a referral to the proconsul, in a document issued in the year 135, originating from the region of Daldis in the province of Asia. It is a dossier of different texts, the most important of which is an edict from the current proconsul of Asia, T. Aurelius Fulvus Boionius Antoninus. He explains that Metras, the son of Metrodorus, and Isidorus, the son of Isidorus, had approached (‘adierunt’) him ‘in the name of the village of the Arhillenoi’ (‘nom(ine) vicanorum Arhillon’) and asked for a grant of market rights for it. The proconsul

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\(^1\) FIRA I\(^2\) no. 74. I thank Claude Eilers for having undertaken the translation of this article.
granted this request, but added that if anyone wanted to file an appeal against this decision, it would have to be done within thirty days either before him or before his successor.²

In both cases representatives of a community—of the city Sabora and the vicus of the Arhillenoi—appeared before someone who could in their opinion make administrative decisions: in one case the emperor, in the other, the proconsul. At least in the case of Sabora, the legati of the city had been given a written request that they had delivered personally to the emperor. In the case of the Arhillenoi, the proconsular edict does not make clear whether their representatives had also delivered a written request to the proconsul, but this is very likely. We have a similar request for the establishment of a market from the year 209, also in the province of Asia, which was made before the proconsul Q. Caecilius Secundus Servilianus. The applicants, whose spokesman was a certain Dionysius, presented a libellus with a written justification for the request, which was ultimately attached to the published version of the decision.³ We should therefore assume that the Arhillenoi had also delivered a written text to the proconsul.

There is nothing unusual about either of these two cases. On the contrary, what we find is a completely normal process, through which a decision in an administrative proceeding was reached by the emperor or a provincial governor. The process encompasses first the appearance of representatives of a larger group of people—a city or a village—before the agents of civil power, then the delivery of a document in which the facts are laid out, and finally a decision. This decision could be given to the applicants either directly in the form of a letter, as it occurred in the case of Sabora four days after the hearing before Vespasian on July 29th, or through the issuing of an edict, as Aurelius Antoninus did in the case of the Arhillenoi.

These observations are naturally not new; on the contrary, this has all been known for a long time and has often discussed in the scholarly literature. Embassies to the emperors are often mentioned in documents.⁴ In many embassies, perhaps even in most of them, the diplo-

² SEG 44, 977 = AE 1994, 1645.
⁴ See esp. J.H. Oliver, Greek Constitutions of Early Roman Emperors from Inscriptions and Papyri (Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, 178; Philadelphia, 1980); another very important letter from Aphrodisias in AE 2000, 1441. Finally, see the paper