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Citation: Giudici, Giacomo (2016) The writing of renaissance politics : the chancery of Francesco II Sforza (1522-1535). [Thesis] (Unpublished)

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BIRKBECK COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

**THE WRITING OF RENAISSANCE POLITICS:
THE CHANCERY OF FRANCESCO II SFORZA (1522–1535)**

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
GIACOMO GIUDICI

Declaration

This is to certify that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.

Signed: (Giacomo Giudici)

Abstract

This thesis takes the chancery of the last Sforza duke of Milan, Francesco II (1522–1535), as a case study to rethink Renaissance written political culture. The initial research hypothesis is that looking at (i) the processes happening *behind* and *around* chancery documents, and at (ii) the traces these processes left on the documents' material body, can unfold a novel perspective on political-institutional history.

Exploring this hypothesis leads me to the formulation of three main claims. The first regards the role of chancery members. In Part I of the thesis ('The Chancery Structure'), I demonstrate that their relationship with power was more complex than clerical: secretaries and clerks were veritable 'shareholders' of power insofar as they were chosen on the basis of the socio-political capital they brought to the court.

In the second part of the thesis ('Chancery Practices') I assert that focusing on informal socio-political practices (instead of abstract structures, official rules, and ideal representations) reveals that the chancery—supposedly the stronghold of a well-defined 'authority'—was in fact a remarkably open and socially-varied hub of information and communication. Scholarship widely treats as anecdotal any evidence of deviations from the monastic-like model of chanceries that is described in normative sources; by contrast, I put such evidence at the core of my analysis.

Finally, in Part III ('Chancery Products') I combine written and material culture by maintaining that a close analysis of the material form of chancery documents reveals the collaborative process of document-making with great precision, thus complementing our understanding of the tensions surrounding the chancery.

To sum up, I use the chancery of Francesco II to enter the discussion on the relationship between writing and state formation; my more general contribution consists in suggesting that state formation by writing was not only an authority-directed, top-down process, but also a bottom-up construction.

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List of Abbreviations

AOMMi	Archivio dell'Ospedale Maggiore di Milano (Archive of the <i>Ospedale Maggiore</i> , Milan)
ASCMi	Archivio Storico Civico di Milano (Municipal Historical Archives, Milan)
ASMi	Archivio di Stato di Milano (State Archives, Milan)
ASMn	Archivio di Stato di Mantova (State Archives, Mantova)
ASTn	Archivio di Stato di Trento (State Archives, Trento)
BAMi	Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano (Ambrosiana Library, Milan)
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Vatican Library, Rome)
BTMi	Biblioteca Trivulziana di Milano (Trivulziana Library, Milan)
DBI	<i>Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani</i> , [82] voll. (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–[2015])
GGAS	<i>Guida Generale degli Archivi di Stato Italiani</i> , 4 voll. (Rome: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 1981–1994)
Storia di Milano	<i>Storia di Milano</i> , 18 voll. (Milan: Fondazione Treccani degli Alfieri per la Storia di Milano, 1953–1996)
VID	Maria Milagros Cárcel Orti (ed.), <i>Vocabulaire International de la Diplomatie</i> (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1994)

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Note on Citation and Transliteration

Printed publications in this thesis are cited mentioning the surname of the publication's author, the publication's year (possibly followed by an 'a' if the author has two publications for one year), and the number of page(s) if needed—e.g.: Gamberini 2005a, 36-38. Complete citations are to be found in the bibliography.

Quotations from unpublished sources are always transcribed in the footnotes, or to be found in section 'Appendix 1;' citations from publications or edited sources are never transcribed, unless it is necessary/useful for the thesis's purposes.

In the transliteration of unpublished sources, abbreviations are always expanded silently.

Introduction

This thesis begins with an early-sixteenth-century charter (fig. I.1, p. 12) written in a beautiful italic hand—the kind of handwriting style in use in late medieval and early modern Italian chanceries. Two elements stand out at the very beginning and at the very end of the charter's text, both clearly signifying the identity of its author, the last Sforza duke of Milan Francesco II (1495–1535). One is the capitalised intitulation *F R A N C I S C U S . I I .*; the other is the duke's huge autograph signature. With the charter, Francesco II appointed a lawyer, Luigi Taverna, to a minor administrative office. The core of the text is a peremptory verb, *duximus* ('we order').

The charter does not communicate only through words: its physical aspect sends an even more explicit (if, as we shall see, deceptive) message. The very size of the charter (51X32), bigger than the papers normally used for correspondence, is clearly intended to hint at the importance of the act. The same can be said for the material the charter is made of—high-quality parchment, elegant and expensive, created to resist the passing of time, so much so that the document is perfectly preserved after almost five-hundred years. Speaking about the expensiveness of parchment, it is worth mentioning that more than half of the charter was purposefully left blank. Paying such a precious writing material for *not writing* on it was an unmistakable show of wealth, one which reinforced the sense of authoritativeness surrounding the object. Everything, in the charter, celebrates the power of Francesco II.

Or does it? On second thought, the trained eye notices that something is clearly missing from the charter. The most evident absence is that of the ducal seal—which charters like this needed to bear in order to be legal. The seal has not just gone missing: there is no sign that it was ever attached. Furthermore, the text is incomplete: it lacks two indispensable elements such as the clause of corroboration (declaring how the charter had been authenticated) and the date (where and when the charter was created.) Therefore, the charter was left unfinished.

Had the unfinished charter found itself in the archive of the sender—Francesco II Sforza—its survival would be unproblematic. It would mean that the Sforza chancery started creating the charter, then aborted the process for some reason, and the charter eventually remained in Francesco's records: quite a common occurrence. However, the unfinished charter I am analysing was preserved in the archive of Luigi Taverna, its *recipient*—which has much more interesting and significant implications. It means that a

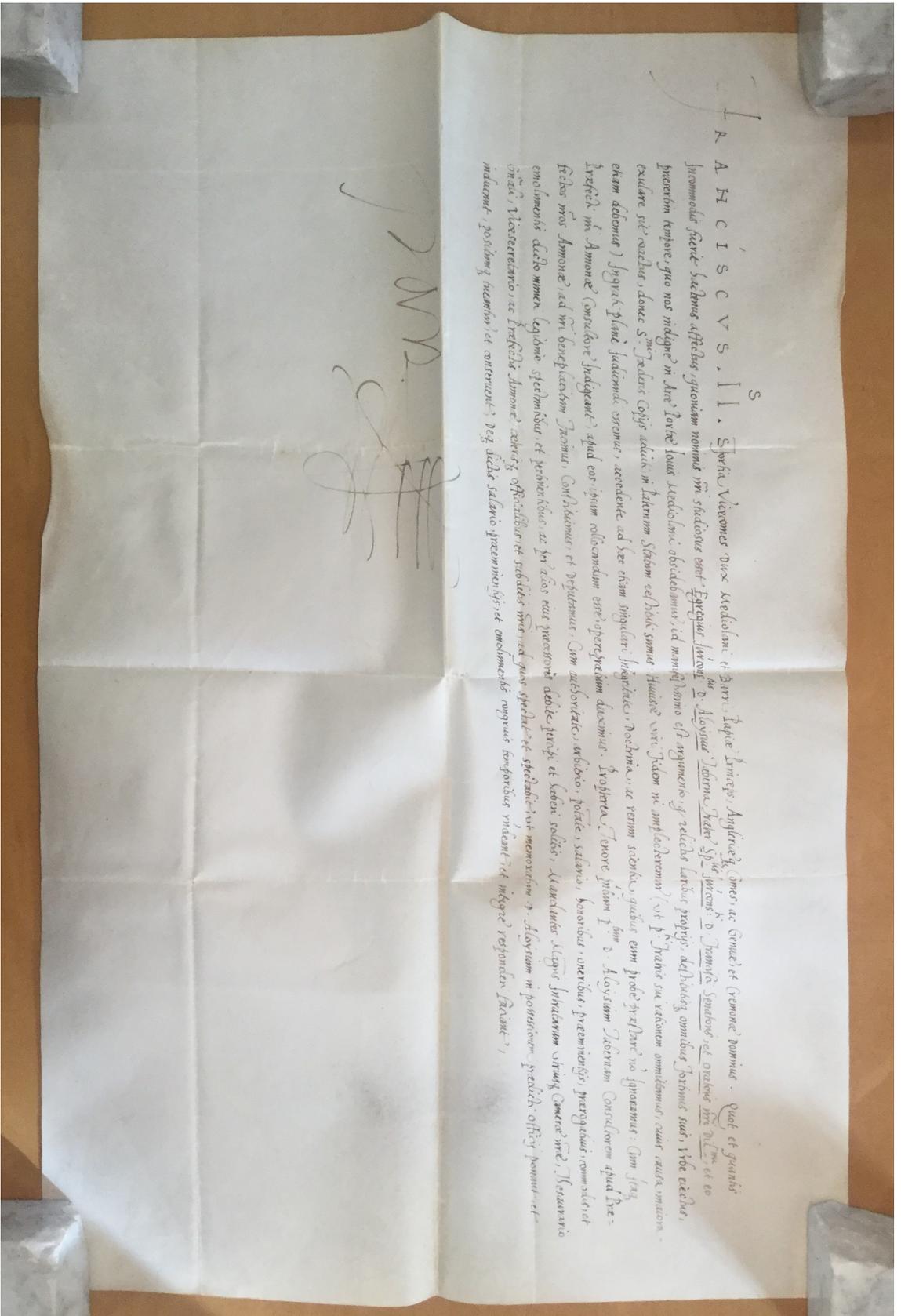


Fig. I.1: Taverna Charter (ASMi, Archivio Taverna, Parte Antica, 1, undated)

charter, not yet fully authenticated but already signed by the duke, was circulating outside the Sforza chancery before its completion. Therefore, outsiders to the chancery handled the charter, and had the chance to tamper with it. How is it possible? This unexpected scenario opens up a series of further questions. Before posing them, however, it is necessary to step back from the charter as an object and contextualise it.

The charter is preserved in the Taverna Archive (*Archivio Taverna*), the private archive of the Taverna family, which was acquired by Milan's State Archives as late as 1997. I stress this recent date, because it allows me to discard the possibility that past archivists arbitrarily moved the charter in question (henceforward 'Taverna charter') from the *Sforzesco* archive (the archive of the Sforza dynasty) to the *Archivio Taverna*. As we shall see (pp. 39-40), mixing documents coming from different historical archives was common practice among late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Milanese archivists, but was deemed as inappropriate (and ultimately forbidden) in the twentieth century. Hence, the current location of the Taverna charter undoubtedly corresponds to the original one.¹

The Taverna family was very important during the early modern age: it began its political ascent in the early-sixteenth century, and its members held prestigious offices in the city and Duchy of Milan until the 1800s. The man who originated the fortunes of the family was Francesco Taverna (1488–1560), who made a spectacular career in the 1520s and 1530s as he became senator, ambassador, and eventually *Gran Cancelliere*—'Great Chancellor,' the head of the Sforza chancery—to duke Francesco II in 1533.

Francesco Taverna was brother of Luigi—the appointee in the Taverna charter. Naturally, this is a strong clue as to why the charter ended up in the *Archivio Taverna*: we can reasonably speculate that Francesco was following so closely his brother's affairs that, at some point, he (or someone on his behalf) physically handled and brought outside the chancery the unfinished charter that would sanction Luigi's appointment. However, it is important to highlight that this happened *before* Francesco became *Gran Cancelliere*, because the document refers to him only as 'senator and ambassador' (see note 2).

Furthermore, the text of the charter suggests that the Tavernas' involvement in the process of document-making could have been even stronger. Indeed, Luigi is explicitly defined as 'the brother of Francesco' (as if it was a 'title.') more generally, the text underscores the loyalty of the Taverna family insofar as it enthusiastically states that Luigi has obtained the office because of his long-term support to the duke.²

1 ASMi, *Archivio Taverna, Parte Antica*, 1, undated (the act begins with the words 'Quot et quantis incommodis.')

2 *Ivi*: '(...) Egregius Iureconsultus Dominus Aloysius Taberna, frater spectabilis Iureconsulti Domini

Who authored the Taverna charter then? We face a striking mismatch. On the one hand, the impressive physicality of the charter (big size, fine parchment,) together with its accurate graphic elements (beautiful handwriting, capitalised intitulation, huge signature) and the content of its text convey a very simple and powerful idea: duke Francesco II Sforza, out of his own sovereign will, made the decision of appointing Luigi Taverna to an administrative office. On the other hand, the circumstances of the charter's production and preservation suggest a completely different story: not one of top-down imposition, but of multiple contribution and confusing authorship. Was the charter signed and written inside or outside the chancery? Was a Sforza chancery clerk or a freelance scribe who physically wielded the pen to write it? Who worded the text? Moreover, had the charter been completed, it would have gone back to the Sforza chancery, where it would have been sealed, its text finished with the missing clause and the date, and signed by at least one Sforza secretary for approval. There are many blind spots in this chain of events, but one thing is certain: the Taverna charter underwent a strongly plural and centrifugal *process of production*, one which stands in sharp contrast with the oversimplifying and centripetal message of its material *product*—the charter itself.

1. The problems: chanceries, chancery practices, and chancery documents

In the specific case of the Taverna charter, it is a series of coincidences (the casual survival of an unfinished charter in the 'wrong' archive) that allows us to appreciate the contrast between the process and the product of document-making very clearly. But the Taverna charter also epitomises the initial hypothesis of this thesis. Looking at (i) the processes happening *behind* and *around* chancery documents, and at (ii) the traces these processes left on the documents' material body, can unfold a novel perspective on political and institutional history: less top-down, more nuanced and participatory. It can offer us compelling insights on the variety of figures who partook in the endeavour of making political-administrative documents; on how they practically partook in such endeavour; and on how the very meaning of chancery documents is transformed once we are aware of the background of their production and use.

To further clarify these last points, let us generalise three problems arising from the Taverna charter and turn them into research questions. The first problem regards chanceries. Thematic dictionaries define the chancery (in Latin *cancellaria*) as an '[a]rea

Francisci Senatoris vel oratoris nostri Dilectissimi, et eo praesertim tempore, quo nos indigne in Arce Portae Iovis Mediolani obsidebatur, id manifestissimo est argumento, quod relictis latibus propriis, destituitisque omnibus fortunis suis, urbe eiectus, exulare sit coactus (...) cum itaque Praefecti nostri Annonae Consultorem (...) collocandum esse (...) duximus.'

or place marked off by barriers (*cancelli*) in which official documents (...) were stored and processed,³ or as a '[r]oyal or episcopal office that issued official documents and preserved records.'⁴ In other words, these definitions see the chancery unproblematically as a centralised office and well-defined physical space that oversaw the production and preservation of documents on behalf of the authorities. However, as we have just seen, documents could easily move back and forth between the chancery and outside the chancery at different stages of their production and even before they were finished. So how did chanceries work? What was their structure and hierarchy? How open were they to outsiders?

The second problem regards chancery practices. I was unable to find a working definition of 'practice' for the field of historical research, even though it is one of cultural history's central concepts.⁵ We can understand practice as a reiterated but informal way of doing something, that a community of participants (or a part thereof) comes to consider acceptable (usually tacitly) and to share, but that remains distinct from (or even in contradiction with) formal rules (or structures) regarding the same activity a given practice pertains to; furthermore, the role played by practices in a process is obliterated in the formal representations of the process itself. The notion of practice is typically associated with non-institutional behaviours, collective or individual; however, as I will demonstrate, it is useful to apply it to chanceries because this allows me to focus on unwritten rules, on processes, and on the mixture of official authority and the forms of its implementation.

In order to better understand this definition, let us look at two chancery practices as they emerge from the Taverna charter. One practice is an outsider to the chancery (Francesco Taverna, or someone on his behalf) bringing the unfinished charter outside the chancery; another practice is outsiders to the chancery (Francesco Taverna and others) actively working on the wording and, possibly, on the material act of writing a chancery document. As we shall see, nothing of this was tolerated in official chancery regulations; and as we have already seen, nothing of this would have emerged from the documentary representation of the finished Taverna charter, had it been completed. Nevertheless, informal practices did take place. How essential to the activity of the chancery were they? And how pervasively should they inform our conception of Renaissance document-

3 Dahmus 1984, s. v. 'chancery.'

4 Bjork 2010, vol. 1, s. v. 'chancery.'

5 Peter Burke makes several examples for the rise of the history of practices, but does not provide a definition for 'practice.' See Burke 2008, 59-64. For other key-works on practices see Bourdieu 1977 and De Certeau 1984.

making?

The third problem regards chancery documents themselves: as shown above, it consists in the tension between the univocal and peremptory message documents convey as finished products, and the multi-staged and surprisingly plural process they undergo during their creation. What tools do we have to approach this fundamental tension? In historical research, diplomatics is the discipline that studies the textual and material forms of documents, and the techniques through which they were produced. Diplomatics is an excellent tool insofar as it provides a precise vocabulary to identify all the single features of a document, thus acknowledging the distinct meaning they encapsulate. However, diplomatics also has two limitations. Firstly, despite being theoretically concerned with both the finished document and its production process, diplomatics has exclusively focused on the first and dismissed the latter. Secondly, born in the late-seventeenth century to draw a clear-cut divide between 'good' (authentic) documents from 'bad' (inauthentic) documents, diplomatics has remained a rigorously descriptive science. Diplomatics describes all the conventions, protocols, and formulae through which authority formally represents itself in documents; however, it does not ask whether or how far the resulting representation of authority is reliable.⁶

For diplomatics, the Taverna charter (if completed) would have been a perfectly authentic and unproblematic letter patent. The *Vocabulaire Internationale de la Diplomatique*—the standard provider of diplomatic definitions, and the one I will refer to for the rest of the dissertation—defines the letter patent as ‘an act, characterised by a relatively solemn form, issued by the chancery of an authority to notify everyone of a decision made out of the authority's own will.’⁷ This definition certainly describes what the Taverna charter *represents*; but does it explain what the Taverna charter *is*? What do we understand of Renaissance authority and power if we are content with the finished chancery product, and discard the document-making process? What is needed, then, is a 'new diplomatics:' an interpretive (and not only descriptive) version of diplomatics that looks at the materiality of documents as a means to *get into* (as opposed to *abstract from*) the socio-political complexities of the process of document-making—these latter understood as an integral part of documents themselves. As I will explain more extensively below (see 2.3), the evolution of the material analysis of chancery documents should parallel that of bibliography and serve as a key to unlock the sociology of these

6 For a concise history of the origin and development of diplomatics, see Duranti 1998, 36-40.

7 *VID*, 98. ‘un acte émané de la chancellerie d'une autorité, établi dans une forme relativement solennelle, pour notifier à tous une décision de sa volonté.’ [my translation]

texts.

Scholarship has not carried out a thorough critique of Renaissance chanceries and their documents yet. More specifically, the questions regarding the importance of informal chancery practices and the need for a new diplomatics have remained unanswered. In fact, as we shall see in the next section, scholarship has always conceived the endeavour of chancery-documents making in the conceptual framework of 'bureaucracy:' an impersonal system of government characterised by a clear hierarchy of authority, specialisation of functions, and adherence to fixed rules. As a consequence, what fits the ideal of bureaucracy (for example the structuring of a chancery in specialised departments) has been considered substantial and worthwhile of attention; by contrast, what contradicts that ideal (for example the direct agency of outsiders in the process of document-making) has been considered anecdotal, or directly dismissed.

Bureaucracy, however, cannot be accepted as an ever-valid, trans-historical framework, but must be historicised. In recent times, Peter Burke argued that 'almost everything seems to have its cultural history written these days:'⁸ but do we really have a cultural history of bureaucracy? Or, rephrasing the question, do we have cultural histories that aim at historicising the documentary interface between the authorities and their subjects—that is, historicising what we have *later* defined as 'bureaucracy?' I wish to rethink Renaissance written political culture setting out from the idea implied by this last question: that the documentary interface between the authorities and their subjects has not always been based on principles of bureaucracy (such as impersonality, hierarchy, functionality, regulation) but is historically situated.

In order to attempt this re-framing, I have chosen a case study—the one the Taverna charter belongs to: the chancery of Francesco II, the last Sforza duke of Milan. In section 3 and 4 of this introduction, I will explain why this particular case study offers unique elements of interest and the sources I have used. However, since my aim—historicising the notion of bureaucracy and to rethinking the nature of Renaissance official written documents—is more general, it is first of all important to discuss (section 2) the historiographical trends that have studied Renaissance chanceries and documents, their achievements and omissions.

8 Burke 2012, 1.

2. Historiographies

2.1. *Writing and State formation: Federico Chabod and his many critics*

In post-war Italy, Renaissance chanceries entered historiography through the decades-long debate on State formation. Federico Chabod's 1958 essay *Y a-t-il un État de la Renaissance? (Was There a Renaissance State?)* was the beginning of this long debate. Chabod's thesis was short: the Italian Renaissance state, he argued, was the first model of centralised modern State. Its establishment and success were mainly due to the emergence of a massive and complex bureaucratic apparatus, made of offices and chanceries and manned by officials owing their position more to administrative expertise than to the personal bond with the sovereign.⁹

Since the years immediately after its formulation, Chabod's idea encountered fierce criticism. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, the supposed modernity of the Renaissance (and early modern) state has been rejected, essentially on the basis of two grounds. Firstly, historians like Philip J. Jones, Giorgio Chittolini and Elena Fasano Guarini have underscored the territorial fragmentation and institutional pluralism of Renaissance states: they have shown that the states' peripheries (either urban or rural) were able to successfully oppose processes of centralisation.¹⁰ Secondly, a group of historians gathering around the research institute *Europa delle Corti* ('Europe of the Courts') has long focused on the enduring importance of courtly culture and networks as a means to highlight the essentially private dimension that the state retained throughout the early modern age.¹¹

The resulting pluralistic, fragmented, and private model of Renaissance state certainly is more realistic than Chabod's 'quasi-modern,' bureaucratic state. And yet, in devising his model, Chabod gave an interpretation to a phenomenon that is undeniable: the remarkable growth of central apparatuses managing (and managed by) writing. If this phenomenon did not centralise state administration (or did so only partially,) then how

9 Chabod, 1964, first published in French in 1958. Chabod built upon a claim of German sociologist Max Weber, who maintained that the Italian Renaissance State was 'the first political power in Western Europe which based its regime on a rational administration with (increasingly) appointed officials.' Weber 1978, vol. 2, 1318.

10 Jones 1965: at page 95, Jones provocatively asked to banish the notion of 'Renaissance state;' Chittolini 1979 and Id. 1979a; Fasano Guarini 1983 and Ead. 1994. See also Petralia 1997. Two anthologies gathering historians with similar positions are Rotelli and Schiera 1971–1974, and Chittolini, Molho, and Schiera 1994, whose English translation is Kirschner 1996. For an overview of the state formation debate, see Blanco 2008.

11 For an overview on the activity of the institute *Europa delle Corti*, see Visceglia 2006. An essay on Gonzaga Mantua remarking the influence of courtly culture on administration is Mozzarelli 1982. On private networks see Chittolini 1994.

should we interpret it? In other words: if the explosion of chancery documents produced and circulating in Renaissance states was not a by-product of bureaucratisation, in what other framework of interpretation should we insert it? Posing this important question—something Chabod's critics fail to do—means re-stating the need to historicise the documentary interface between Renaissance institutions and the subjects they ruled (or attempted to rule.)

2.2. The Italian 'documentary history of institutions'

Around the mid-1990s, just when the debate on State formation lost momentum, another Italian historiographical trend began to focus on chanceries—this time more directly, investigating their organisation and functioning. Such trend is now usually referred to as 'documentary history of institutions' (in Italian: *storia documentaria delle istituzioni*; henceforward DHI). The DHI's core claim is that the study of the organisation of political-administrative writing in Renaissance states offers an optimal vantage point to appreciate their logic, evolution and ambitions. The first volume to explore such claim in a comparative perspective was *Cancelleria e amministrazione negli Stati italiani del Rinascimento (Chancery and Administration in the Italian Renaissance States)*, edited by Franca Leverotti in 1994.¹²

The DHI builds upon diverse historiographical tradition and approaches. The first is a series of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century studies that investigated the most basic features of Italian medieval chanceries in a strictly institutional perspective. Among the case studies involved were the Republic of Venice and of Florence, the kingdom of Naples and of Sicily, and the papal chancery.¹³ The second is composed of anthropological studies highlighting the cultural and political importance of the organisation of writing in any given society. Jack Goody's *The Logic of Writing and Organization of Society* is a milestone of this trend, and anthropology certainly influenced two of the most prominent Italian historians of writing, Armando Petrucci and Attilio Bartoli Langeli.¹⁴ The third strand is composed of scholars who have studied the impact of the emergence of written administrative communication in polities. From this point of view, Michael Clanchy's *From Memory to Written Record* is a point of reference, together

¹² Leverotti 1994. Three years later, Leverotti edited *Gli ufficiali negli stati italiani del Quattrocento* (Leverotti 1997), which broadened the analytical perspective to the entire administrative apparatuses of Italian fifteenth-century states.

¹³ Baschet 1870, Marzi 1910, Capasso 1894, La Mantia 1918, Tangl 1894.

¹⁴ Goody 1986, Cardona 1981, Petrucci 1986, Id. 1988; Bartoli Langeli 2006.

with the work of German medievalist Hagen Keller on Italian communes.¹⁵ Finally, the DHI brings to the fourteenth- and fifteenth century many insights from the work of medievalists who identified and studied the thirteenth-century Italian 'documentary revolution'—namely the steep rise and diversification of institutional documents that coincided with the more widespread literacy revolution of the time. According to these medievalists (among them Paolo Cammarosano and Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur,) there is a tight connection between the appearance of a new documentary system and the establishment of a new political-administrative system—that of the Italian Communes. The novelty of the new documentary system consisted in the preeminence of the laity (which ended the high-medieval ecclesiastical quasi-monopoly on writing) and in the cooperation between notaries and political-administrative institutions.¹⁶

In line with these influences, the main achievement of the DHI has been the detection of three documentary novelties that shaped Renaissance states. Firstly, the appearance of powerful central chanceries translating coherent political-administrative leadership into writing. Secondly, the development of a capillary network of peripheral offices, made possible by a continuous flow of letters between the state's centre and peripheries. Thirdly, the spread of distinctively seigneurial documentary typologies—like letters patent—as opposed to the notarial character of communal political-administrative writings.¹⁷ The analysis of these three novelties in different case studies has allowed historians to highlight the interconnectedness of Italian political space, and to provide a reliable time-line for the all but self-evident shift from communal to Renaissance forms of power. It is not by chance, then, that the scholar who ultimately gave the DHI its name (Isabella Lazzarini) and one of its major interpreters (Andrea Gamberini) have recently focused on the history and concept of Italian Renaissance state.¹⁸

As it is clear from this overview, the DHI takes the same process highlighted by Chabod—the explosive growth of centralised political-administrative structures—and examines it more accurately than him. The DHI studies the timing and modes of

15 Clanchy 1979; Keller, Grübmueller and Staubach 1992; Keller and others 2002.

16 Cammarosano 1991 and Maire Vigueur 1995. Other important works belonging to this trend include, in chronological order: Bartoli Langeli 1985; VV. AA. 1989; Bartoli Langeli, 1994; Albini 1998. Very useful recap of these developments in Francesconi, 2014 and De Vivo, Guidi and Silvestri 2015, especially pp. 10-20. A recent volume that has investigated the documentary culture of the laity since the Early Middle Ages is Brown and others 2013.

17 Lazzarini 2008; Ead. 2009. Since the mid-1990s, Isabella Lazzarini has been implementing the DHI: Ead. 1996, Ead. 2001a, Ead. 2004. Other important studies that build upon the insights of the DHI are Castelnovo 1994, Senatore 1998, Folini 2004, especially the section 'La cancelleria ducale;' Gamberini, 2005, especially Ch. 1: 'Istituzioni e scritture di governo nella formazione dello stato visconteo.'

18 Gamberini and Lazzarini 2012. The formula 'documentary history of institutions' was introduced in Lazzarini 2001.

administrative centralisation for each Renaissance state with great precision, and observes reciprocal influences between different case studies. Furthermore, it also acknowledges the existence and importance of 'peripheral' institutions, either urban, feudal, or ecclesiastical—this approach deriving from the success of the 'de-centralising' historiography analysed above (see 2.1).

However, the DHI is more concerned with structures than with practices. As a consequence, it eventually keeps Chabod's 'grand narrative' of progressive bureaucratisation, and tends to measure every change in the organisation of writing against the ideal of bureaucracy. Therefore, despite its remarkable achievements, the DHI fails to answer the question I posed at the end of the previous section: what were chanceries, what was document making, and how are we to interpret chancery documents before the emergence of a solid bureaucratic paradigm? More generally, the problem is that DHI—the documentary history of *institutions*—does not reflect on what an institution *is* (how informal, plural, collective.)

Going back to the example I used to begin this introduction, the Taverna charter raises problems that the DHI is not able to address. As we shall see, the Sforza chancery theoretically had a centralised organisation; nevertheless, Francesco Taverna circumvented it by simply bringing the charter outside the chancery. Generally speaking, the individualised and seigneurial narrative of the ducal charter is readily belied by the charter's complex, multi-staged construction—which we have the chance to appreciate thanks to the charter's 'unfinished-ness.' The question is whether we should ignore documents like these and accept the linear narrative of the DHI, or we should thoroughly explore the centrifugal counter-perspective suggested by documents like the Taverna charter. I choose this second option: I will test such counter-perspective, verifying if and to what extent it is tenable and fruitful.

2.3. The material analysis of texts

In this attempt I will focus on the evidence of what concretely happened in and around chanceries, and on the very body of documents. But if 'classic' diplomatics, as pointed out above (p. 16), is inadequate to reveal hidden aspects of document-making, help comes from the material analysis of texts other than chancery documents.

Among the fields that study texts, book history was the first to adopt a material approach as a means to improve the interpretation of its object of study. Around forty years ago, through bibliography—the study of books as physical objects—book historians

ceased to see texts as disembodied carrier of ideas, and started considering their material form as meaningful and revealing as their words. The analysis of books' layout, paratext, and non-textual features has brought to the discovery of cultural and social practices of book production, reception, circulation, and transmission. This, in turn, has opened the way to the writing of compelling cultural histories. Just to make one example, Mirjam Foot has argued that book-bindings can be studied as a 'mirror of society.'¹⁹

The material approach is now widely accepted for the analysis of books, but has not been systematically applied to chancery documents yet. Historians still tend to see chancery documents only as containers of information, or (in the case of charters) as unproblematic expressions of authority, with few exceptions (all dealing with medieval legal charters, or cartularies.)²⁰ This limiting attitude is surprising for at least two reasons. Firstly, because as early as 1978—that is, even before book history embraced material culture—French medievalist Jacques Le Goff wrote a seminal essay inviting historians to go beyond the most apparent meanings of official records, to consider their material features and—as he put it—'monumentalisation,' but his plea remained unanswered (see below, p. 22 and sub-section 2.4).²¹ Secondly, because in the last twenty-five years the material approach has successfully expanded to all kinds of textual objects. Today journals, pamphlets, public proclamations, letters and epigraphs have undergone material analyses that have augmented our understanding of the texts' meanings and functions. Not for nothing, materiality is at the base of the mechanisms of manuscript culture.²² The lack of a material approach to chancery documents is especially striking if compared to the rise of scholarly attention for the socio-political practices associated with the publication of writings. Indeed, chancery documents like letters patent were public by definition, but we still know almost nothing about their display and circulation.²³

More specifically, one of the major accomplishments of the material analysis of texts has been the problematisation of authorship. Indeed, considering texts as objects that

19 Foot 1998. Classics of bibliography are McKenzie 1986, Genette, 1997, and now the collection of essays Chartier 2014. A recent valuable overview on books as material and cultural objects is Pearson 2011.

20 In 2015, Jessica Berenbeim has published a book focusing on the place of legal charters in medieval England's visual culture: Berenbeim 2015. Other examples include Danbury 1989, Heidecker, 2000, Kosto and Winroth 2002.

21 Le Goff 1978.

22 A very useful volume with several different case studies and a methodological introduction on the material analysis of texts is Daybell and Hinds 2010. A classic study on the materiality of epigraphies is Petrucci 1993. On the materiality of letters see Id. 2008, Stewart 2011, Daybell 2012. On manuscript culture in general, see Beal 1998, Love and Marotti 2002, and Richardson 2009. A paradigmatic case study is analysed in Scott-Warren 2000.

23 On publication see Fogel 1987, Love 1993, and Jouhaud and Viala 2003.

are constructed—instead of as 'givens,' steady entities—inevitably blurs clear-cut divisions between authors, their aides, recipients and publishers. As a result, scholars have explored the extent to which pre-modern authorship of both literary and non-literary texts could be collective and social.²⁴ But again, chancery documents have been excluded from such reflection—even though, being political documents, knowing how plural was their authorship would clearly be fundamental.

My objective, then, is adding chancery documents to the group of textual objects for which a material approach is possible and desirable. I want to test whether the analysis of chancery documents' physical form, too, has the potential of revealing something compelling about their meaning, their authorship, and the socio-political practices behind their making. The key to achieve this, as demonstrated by the example of the Taverna charter, is realising that documents can be studied not only as finished products, but also as dynamic *processes*. From this point of view, it is worth focusing on the old Jacques Le Goff's above-mentioned essay, because it offers some precious—and undeveloped—methodological suggestions.

2.4. Jacques Le Goff's Documento/monumento and the historiography of the material turn

Jacques Le Goff's essay is entitled *Documento/monumento* ('Document/monument'). By using this couple, Le Goff claims that every document not only carries its strict contents (the 'document' proper: for example, in the case of a letter patent, the establishment of a specific juridical act) but also embeds them in a precise narrative of power and authority, expressed through the document's form (the 'monument.'). In this sense, Le Goff argues, the document is an 'assemblage' (*montaggio*), a term that indicates both a process (the act of juxtaposing different elements) and a product (the composite resulting from the juxtaposition of the said elements.)

According to Le Goff, historians have long been 'too passive before documents,' meaning that they too readily take the documents' inherent narrative of power and authority at face value, as if it represented a historical reality. Instead, historians should consider the idea that documents, too, can be studied as monuments—that is, as devices conceived for representing and transmitting a partial memory. Regarding this last point,

²⁴ On the authorship of literary texts, see Perry 1999, Ezell 2003, Vickers 2004, Clare 2012, Goodrich 2013, Guy-Bray and Pong Linton 2013, Pollack-Pelzner 2015, Todorovich 2016. On the authorship of non-literary texts see Malena 2012 and Dimeo 2013. On the authorship of manuscript letters, for the Middle Ages, see Kestemont, Moens and Deploige 2015; the case of Bernard de Clairvaux: Leclercq 1962–1992, vol. IV (1987), 147–153; for the early modern period, on the role of Francis Bacon in the authorship of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex: Stewart 2009; on Fulke Greville: Frammer Jr 1969; see also Goldring 2008. On women's epistolary authorship: Daybell 1999, Id. 1999a, Shemek 2003.

Le Goff enunciates three powerful statements. Firstly, he maintains that ‘the document is the product of the society that created it following the relations of power in force in the society itself.’²⁵ Secondly, he adds that ‘the document is not innocent,’ but ‘the result of an assemblage—either conscious or unconscious—carried out by the age or the society that produced it but also by the following ages.’²⁶ Finally, he concludes.

[t]he document is a monument. It is the result of the effort made by past societies to impose a specific image of themselves (...). A monument is first and foremost a camouflage (*travestimento*), a deceitful appearance, an assemblage. It is necessary to disassemble, demolish such assemblage, to de-construct that construction and to analyse the conditions in which that documents-monuments were created.²⁷

Whereas Le Goff’s essay was primarily intended for medievalists, and (in my knowledge) neither he nor any scholar interested in chancery documents developed its intuitions in subsequent studies, my dissertation will draw from his critical principles to apply them to Renaissance documents. More specifically, I will take three key-terms used by Le Goff—‘relations of power,’ ‘assemblage,’ and ‘de-construction’—very concretely in order to construct my claims. Did relations of power only constitute an abstract domain, or did they also meaningfully play out in the material domain of chancery practices? Was the assemblage of documents only an intellectual process, or also a very material one, taking place stage after stage, each one with its protagonists? Similarly: is the assemblage’s de-construction only a conceptual effort, or does it revolve around the material possibility of observing who, how and at what stage produced which of the different elements that compose a document?

In this sense, I will apply a material-culture perspective to documents and document-making: a development that Le Goff probably did not foresee, even though both *Documento/monumento* and the conceptualisation of material culture had a common influence, that of social and cultural theory. Indeed, material culture, in the form of the history of consumption and the history of everyday life, first emerged as a field to investigate those sections of society that did not leave substantial written records.²⁸ Later on, however, the ‘material turn’ has brought ‘object-based research [to cover] a great variety of topics and issues ranging from gender to politics and race,’ and it has also shown the potential ‘to re-cast established historical narratives in new and exciting ways.’²⁹ This is exactly what I wish to achieve with my thesis: offering a new view on

25 Le Goff 1978, 45 [my translation].

26 *Ibid.*, 46 [my translation].

27 *Ivi.* [my translation]

28 Key-works in the history of consumption and the history everyday life include: Weatherill 1988, Goldthwaite 1995, Roche 2000, Welch 2005.

29 Gerritsen and Riello 2014, 7. Other methodological essays are Prown 2001, Grassby 2005, Rublack

Renaissance political-institutional history through a material analysis of documents and documentary production.

But why choose to focus on Sforza Milan? And, more specifically, why the chancery of duke Francesco II? After having explained how I aim to bring together a number of different disciplines and historiographical trends (diplomats, classic historiographies of State formation, documentary history of institutions, the material analysis of texts, material culture,) it is time to explain the choice of my case study.

3. The case study: the Sforza chancery under duke Francesco II (1522–1535)

In this section, I wish to provide summary background information that is necessary to understand my chosen case study: the Sforza chancery under duke Francesco II. First (3.1) I will provide a brief synopsis of the history of Milan from the accession of the Sforza dynasty to their demise. I will also (3.2) focus in more detail on the history of Francesco's reign. I will then set out the history of the Sforza chancery between 1450 and 1499, the 'golden age' of the Sforza (3.3). As this is one of the best studied chanceries of late medieval Italy, I will discuss the historiography on the Sforza chancery, which however has neglected the chancery's final period, under Francesco II—as we shall see, early-sixteenth-century Milan in general has attracted little scholarship (3.4). On this basis I make the case for studying Francesco II's chancery, claiming that there are many good reasons to analyse a chancery, chancery practices, and chancery documents during an age of turmoil like the years 1522–1535 (3.5).

3.1. The Sforza, ruling dynasty of Milan (1450–1535)

The Sforza seized the Duchy of Milan in 1450, when Francesco I Sforza—originally a warlord (*condottiero*)—succeeded duke Filippo Maria Visconti (who died without male heirs in 1447) thanks to the marriage with the latter's daughter, Bianca Maria. Even though the formal legitimacy of this succession was far from solid, the Peace of Lodi (1454) that stabilised the whole Italian peninsula for forty years, allowed Francesco I and his descendants to maintain their power until 1499. As anticipated above, the fifty years between 1450 and 1499 are often referred to as the 'golden age' of the Sforza, and I will adopt this convenient label for the rest of the dissertation.³⁰

The Duchy was a densely populated dominion of around 1,200,000 inhabitants,

2013. Examples of material-culture studies addressing broad historical themes are Thirsk 1978, Pardailhé-Galabrun 1991, Bauer 2001, Avery, Calaresu and Laven 2015.

30 Data for the *événementielle* summary of this section come from various histories of the Sforza: Cellerino 1998, Somaini 1998, Del Tredici 2012a.

located in the middle of a fertile plain, at the intersection of strategic trade routes, and hosting one of the biggest and wealthiest urban centres in Europe—Milan counted 80-120,000 inhabitants around 1450 (fig. I.2, p. 28).³¹ Therefore, controlling the Duchy of Milan automatically allowed the Sforza to play a major role in Italian and European politics. However, it also exposed them to continuous political tensions: 'super-powers' like the Holy Roman Empire, the kingdom of France and the Republic of Venice wished to have the Milanese in their sphere of influence.

As a consequence of these tensions, the political history of Milan is marked by hectic and often violent events. When Francesco died in 1466, his son Galeazzo Maria took power, but was assassinated ten years later—possibly because of his despotic attitude against the Milanese aristocracy. Four years of uncertainty followed (1477–1480), with Galeazzo Maria's wife, Bona of Savoy, struggling to rule on behalf of her son Gian Galeazzo, while Ludovico Sforza (Galeazzo Maria's brother) plotted to take control of the Duchy from his nephew. Eventually Ludovico eliminated some of his opponents, confined Bona in a castle, and took power—even though he nominally only acted as regent, a tutor to Gian Galeazzo. When the latter died, probably of poison, in 1494, Ludovico officially became duke of Milan, and—unlike his predecessors—he also obtained an official investiture from the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg.

Ludovico's exploit coincided with years of unmatched cultural and artistic splendour for Milan and its Duchy. Indeed, building upon the legacy of his predecessors from the time of the Visconti, duke Ludovico established one of the most refined courts of Renaissance Italy. Leonardo da Vinci worked in Milan between 1482 and 1499, designing several engineering works and completing masterpieces like the *Virgin of the Rocks* and *The Last Supper*; architect Donato Bramante worked on Santa Maria delle Grazie and many other buildings around the Duchy; in the field of historiography, humanist Bernardino Corio began to write an ambitious *Historia di Milano*, with the intent of celebrating the glory of the Sforza.³²

However, the reign of Ludovico ended in acute political instability as the Italian Wars broke out in 1494 and the French penetrated into the Italian peninsula. In 1499, king Louis XII conquered Milan and its Duchy. The years between 1499 and 1535, with six

31 I take these estimates from Somaini 2012, 67. To make some comparisons, Florence counted around 90,000 inhabitants, its state 800,000 inhabitants; Venice counted around 100,000 inhabitants, its Terraferma 1,500,000 inhabitants; the Kingdom of Naples had around 1,800,000 inhabitants. For a *longue-durée* comparison with Flanders, see Chittolini 2010.

32 For a general overview on the Sforza court see Lubkin 1990. For a more complete study on the Sforza court at the time of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, see Id. 1994; for artistic patronage in Visconti-Sforza Milan see Welch 1995; for an overview on Ludovico's age, see VV. AA. 1983.

regime changes, were some of the most uncertain in the entire history of Milan. The French ruled between 1499 and 1512, and then again between 1515 and 1521; the Sforza managed to re-take power between 1512 and 1515 under Massimiliano Sforza (Ludovico's first-born), and in the years 1522–1525 and 1531–1535 with Massimiliano's brother, Francesco II; the emperor Charles V of Habsburg controlled the city *de facto* between 1526 and 1530, and then definitely from 1535 onwards. Rich and strategically located, the Duchy of Milan had indeed been the most valuable prize in the European-wide competition between France and the Holy Roman Empire (fig. I.3, p. 29).

3.2. Francesco II Sforza, duke of Milan (1522–1535)

Since Francesco II is the central figure of this thesis, it is therefore appropriate to outline the main events of his reign. Throughout the thesis, I will refer to Francesco II's age as 'Sforza restoration.' As pointed out above, there were actually two Sforza restorations—one under Massimiliano (1512–1515) and one under Francesco II (1522–1535)—but the first has a very marginal role in my arguments, and it is more convenient not to consider it.³³

Francesco II nominally became duke in 1516, at the beginning of the second French domination of the Milanese (1516–1521), after Massimiliano retired in France (thus abandoning every claim to the ducal title.) Starting from 1516, the Sforza headquarters was in Trent, a South-tyrolean town controlled by the Habsburg. There, Francesco was under the protection of prince-bishop Bernardo Cles—a key-character for the education of the soon-to-be duke, and one that will also play an important 'documentary role' in this dissertation. Seven years later, between November 1521 and April 1522, the Sforza party eventually managed to recapture the Duchy: on 4 April 1522, Francesco entered Milan.

The dominion now controlled by Francesco II was approximately one-fifth smaller than that of the Sforza golden age (fig. I.4, p. 30). Between 1503 and 1512, the strategic northern areas of Bellinzona, Locarno, Lugano, Chiavenna, and the Valtellina were lost to the Swiss; in 1522, the long-contested rich towns of Parma and Piacenza were yielded to the Pope in exchange for non-hostility to the new *status quo*.³⁴ In addition, the military and financial support that Francesco obtained from Charles V for recapturing the Duchy gave the latter the possibility of interfering in Sforza politics. And yet, despite these limitations, Francesco and his aides did not consider themselves as mere

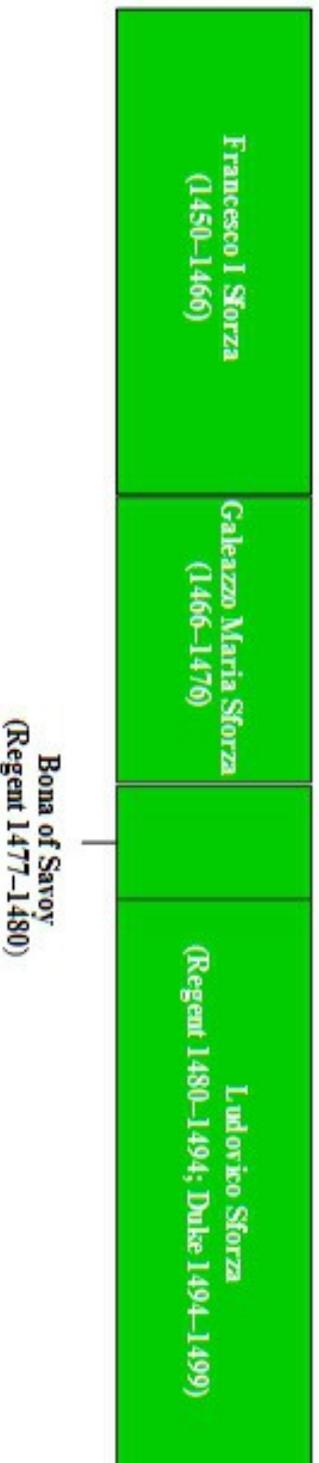
³³ I drew this overview of the history of Francesco II from Benzoni 1998 and Sacchi 2005, vol. 1, 23-57.

³⁴ Muto 2006, 14-15.



Fig. I.2: Map of the Duchy of Milan, 1450–1499

Sforza Golden Age (1450–1499)



Milan in the Italian Wars (1499–1535)



Fig. I.3: Timeline of rulers of Milan and its Duchy, 1450-1535

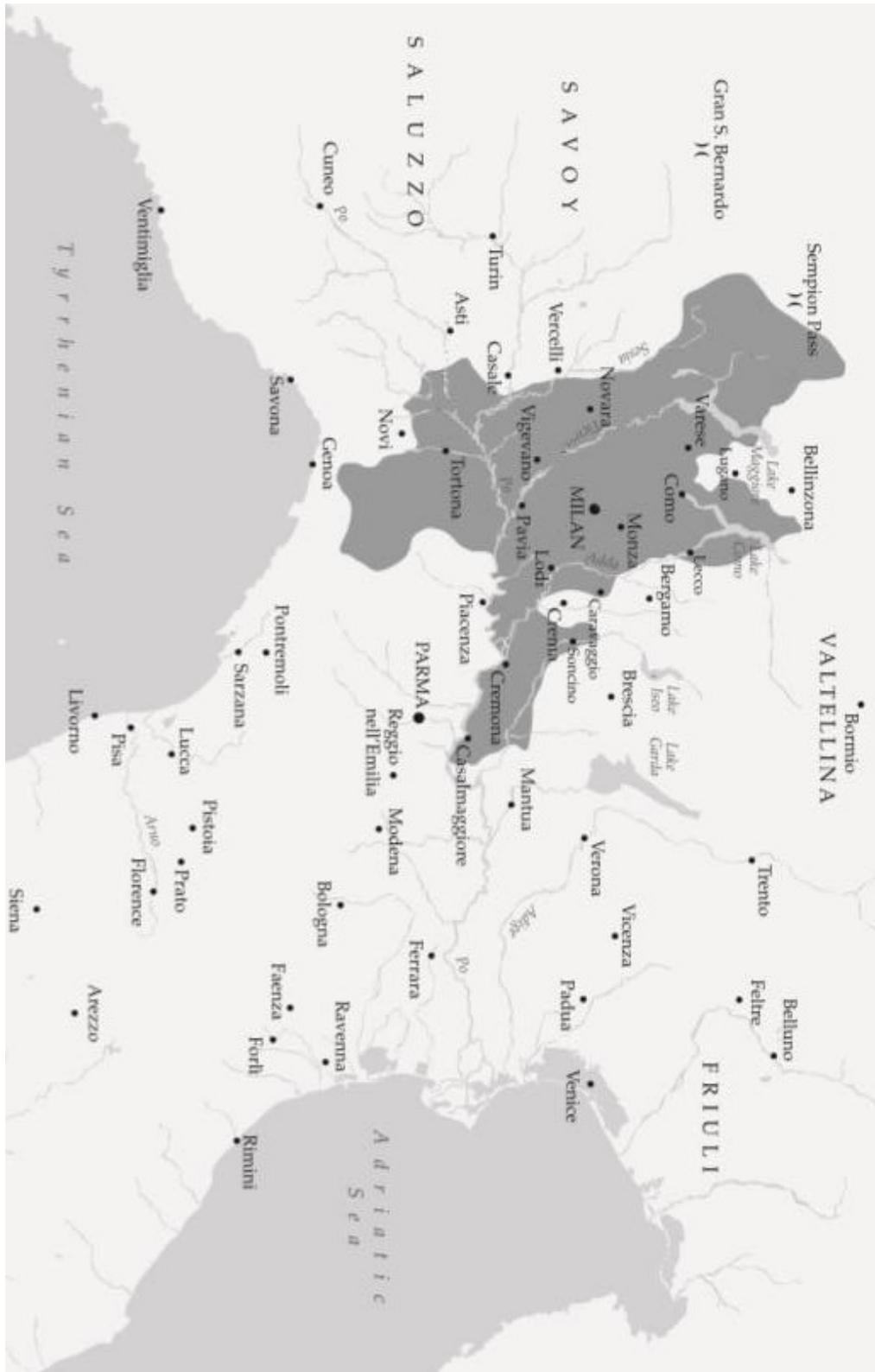


Fig. I.4: Map of the Duchy of Milan in 1535

place-holders, but showed a remarkable will to formulate political projects.

Nothing demonstrates such will better than an ambitious decree (called *Constitutio* after its starting word) that was issued on 18 May 1522, and established a new institutional order for the Duchy. It included two key-measures. Firstly, the Senate—despite being a distinctively French institution—would continue to exist, ruling in partnership with Francesco II. Secondly, the head of the Sforza chancery, formerly called *primo segretario* ('chief secretary,' see below, p. 33) would now have the title of *Gran Cancelliere*, and acquire the prerogatives of a plenipotentiary minister—the role of the chancery was thus outlined in the founding document of the Sforza restoration. The first *Gran Cancelliere* was Girolamo Morone (1480–1529), a very skilful lawyer who had served under both the French and duke Massimiliano, and had been especially instrumental in preparing Francesco's return. I will discuss the political impact (also on a documentary level) of both the Senate and the figure of the *Gran Cancelliere* in greater detail later in the dissertation (pp. 281-283 for the Senate, pp. 68-70 for the *Gran Cancelliere*). For the moment, it is worth pointing out that unfortunately there is no evidence to trace an accurate documentary history of how the *Constitutio* was conceived.

The high ambitions of Francesco II's debut met an extremely difficult political transition. The French were ejected from the castle of Milan only one year after the return of the Sforza, in April 1523; in August, Francesco survived a murder attempt; in October 1524, more French pressure and a plague epidemic forced the whole Sforza court to leave Milan. The victorious battle of Pavia (25 February 1525), in which the imperial army destroyed the French and even captured king Francis I, looked like the end of Francesco's problems. To the contrary, it was the beginning of another, more troublesome phase.

In October 1525, *Gran Cancelliere* Girolamo Morone was allegedly discovered plotting an anti-imperial alliance with the French, the pope, and Venice to curb Charles V's cumbersome influence on Italian affairs. As a result, Charles V's lieutenants arrested Morone and besieged Francesco II in the castle of Milan. In August 1526, Francesco—who always claimed his and Morone's innocence—agreed to leave the city. He was expected to reach Como (loyal to Charles V,) but chose to move to Crema, a town under Venetian control: his hostility to the Empire was now explicit. The following years (1526–1530) saw Milan ruled by the imperial party, while the duke tried to organise an opposition and diplomatic contacts from minor strongholds like the South-eastern-Lombard cities of Cremona and Lodi.

In January 1530, after long negotiations, Francesco II again changed sides and

received the emperor's official 'forgiveness' and ducal investiture. This process actually culminated only fourteen months later, between March and April 1531, when the Spanish soldiers left Milan and the Sforza leadership could once again settle in the city's commanding fortress, the castle of Porta Giovia. The years between 1531 and 1535 were relatively quiet. Francesco's main problem was now that of ensuring his succession. Emperor Charles V's consent was crucial for his marriage: the emperor himself finally designated Christine of Denmark, daughter of the king of Denmark and Isabella of Austria (the emperor's sister.) Christine was only 12 when she became duchess-consort of Milan (13 October 1533): too young to have children, and this was probably the reason why she was chosen in the first place. Two years later (October 1535) Francesco suddenly fell seriously ill. His life had been considered in danger for years because of his fragile health, but at the age of 40 the worst seemed to be over. He died between 1 and 2 November 1535, and the Sforza dynasty ended with him. The Duchy was incorporated in Charles V's dominion without any political commotion.

3.3. *The Sforza chancery between 1450 and 1499*

Let us now focus on the history of the Sforza from the point of view of their chancery. Already before 1450, when he was a *condottiero*, Francesco Sforza had a small personal chancery that moved with him.³⁵ However, the chancery was very simple: it did not have any functional division, and every scribe could deal with any matter, without specialisation. Indeed, one single series of registers gathered all the issued ducal documents in chronological order, with no thematic distinctions and lacking clerical signatures of any kind.³⁶

A division of the chancery in four branches rapidly emerged during the 1450s, as soon as the government structure gradually became more complex. The birth of every branch can be seen through the appearance of thematic registers in the *Sforzesco* archive. The original core of the chancery managed diplomatic communication and the correspondence between the duke (or the Sforza leadership) and their officials around the Duchy of Milan. We can describe this as the political branch in contrast to the second and third branches (which emerged in succession in 1451): the beneficial chancery—which dealt with ecclesiastical affairs—and the judicial (or criminal) chancery. The fourth

35 Papers produced by this chancery are now held in a section of Milan's State Archives bearing the nineteenth-century name *Sforzesco Avanti il Principato*. ('*Sforzesco* [archive] Before [the establishment of] the Principality').

36 For a summary of the main developments of the Sforza chancery, see Leverotti 1994a, especially 310-318. Further literature is cited in the next sub-section (3.4).

branch to emerge was the financial chancery (1456), which managed the income and expenses of the ducal *Camera*, the financial department. Therefore, after an immediate structuring in the first two years of the Sforza age (1450-1451), the chancery found its balance only after the peace of Lodi (1454).

As far as the chancery hierarchy is concerned, every branch had its own secretary-in-chief and a number of subordinate clerks and coadjutors. The political branch, given its importance, had most secretaries. Its head—Cicco Simonetta between 1450 and 1480, Bartolomeo Calco between 1480 and 1499—had the title of *primo segretario* and supervised the activities of the chancery as a whole. Of the four branches, the political chancery was the proper *cancellaria segreta* ('secret,' or 'privy' chancery). However, both contemporaries (see p. 143, n. 120) and scholars extend(ed) the use of the terms *cancellaria segreta* to include also the beneficial and judicial branches—probably because the latter were subjected to the control of the *primo segretario*. By contrast, the financial branch always had a life of its own, and was largely independent from the rest of the chancery structure. I will follow this terminological distinction for the rest of the thesis: in mentioning the 'secret chancery,' I will be referring to the political, beneficial and judicial branches together; in mentioning the 'chancery,' I will be referring to the four branches including the financial one.

In becoming more functional and sophisticated, the chancery first doubled (between 1450 and the 1460s) and then tripled (1480-90s) its original size, hosting an ever-growing number of scribes. On the subject of chancery size, it is appropriate to introduce here a concept that is strictly related to it, but at the same time transcends it, and for which I coin a new term: 'wordpower.' With this term I indicate, in the most general way possible, the will and ability to produce written documents so as to set up an interaction between the duke and his party on the one hand, and subjects and interlocutors (individual subjects, communities of subjects, Sforza officers, other institutions) on the other. As it is clear from the connection between the rooting of the Sforza and the growth of their chancery, wordpower was a decisive component of authority; it complemented and augmented other crucial powers—both 'hard' and 'soft,' like military power and artistic patronage—even though historians are much more used to consider these latter, and not the former, as the chief assets on which authority rested. The size of the chancery was one of the most basic elements for building wordpower. It was determined by the encounter between ambitions (the number of people the dukes would have wanted for the management of written communication) and reality (the number of people the dukes

could afford for that management.)³⁷

The four-branch organisation of the chancery that structured Sforza wordpower lasted for the entire golden age. However, temporary alterations to this pattern did take place. The judicial chancery, for example, was initially so identified with his secretary-in-chief, Angelo da Rieti, as to temporarily disappear when he died in 1464; the fact that Cicco Simonetta was able to control judicial affairs personally from da Rieti's death until 1468 is a sign of the *primo segretario's* rising influence. Other major changes occurred throughout the 1480s, when Ludovico Sforza, then acting as regent, set up a 'shadow' personal chancery because he distrusted the men connected to duke Gian Galeazzo, and wished to manage important matters without interference.

The association between the Sforza chancery (especially the political branch) and power was so tight that every ducal succession led to reshuffles of secretaries and clerks. This process normally took place peacefully, usually with the relocation of 'compromised' personnel to minor administrative chanceries. However, between 1477 and 1480, the Sforza chancery was at the forefront of political conflict. After Galeazzo Maria Sforza's assassination, it was Cicco Simonetta who in practice ruled the state and led the opposition to Ludovico. As a result, when the latter prevailed, the *primo segretario* was tried and eventually beheaded.

The year 1480 represents a break in the history of the Sforza as much as in that of the chancery. Simonetta's successor was Bartolomeo Calco, who held the post until 1499. Calco's tenure was less politically charged than that of Simonetta: Ludovico already had his own loyalists, and needed an acquiescent man to hold the post of *primo segretario*. This is so true that Calco, despite his preeminent role, was *not* eliminated by the French as they took control of the Sforza Duchy in 1499. He continued to act as secretary in the chancery of the newly-founded Senate of Milan.³⁸

3.4. Scholarship on the Sforza chancery

The golden age chancery has long inspired a rich historiography. From as early as the late-nineteenth century and up to the 1970s, local historians and archivists carried out a series of seminal studies analysing the chancery structure, editing some of its most important documents, and compiling detailed repertoires of chancery members. All these works are still essential to the researcher who wants to approach the Sforza chancery.³⁹

37 On the Sforza military see Covini 1998. On artistic patronage Welch 1995.

38 Leverotti 2002, 229.

39 Formentini 1877, Natale 1962, Id. 1962–1969, Id. 1977, Santoro 1948, Ead. 1968.

Furthermore, starting from the 1990s, scholars of the DHI have then taken the chancery as a paradigmatic case study to support their claims. Indeed, the history of the Sforza chancery not only runs parallel to that of the Sforza dynasty, but also helps reveal and explain the dynasty's unraveling with great precision. In this sense, the work of Franca Leverotti is fundamental. In two essays dated 1994 and 2011, Leverotti has charted the evolution of the chancery structure and personnel between 1450 and 1499, highlighting how changes in the chancery reflect or anticipate changes in the balance of power within the Duchy's political leadership.⁴⁰

In addition, a number of studies have acknowledged the crucial importance of the Sforza chancery in the wider context of Renaissance Italy from the point of view of diplomacy and information management. Isabella Lazzarini, for example, has included the Sforza chancery in her works on the documentary history of fifteenth-century northern-Italian principalities (Sforza Milan, Gonzaga Mantua, Este Ferrara).⁴¹ Moreover, Francesco Senatore has studied the chancery under Francesco I Sforza (1450–1466) to conduct one of the most influential monographs of the last twenty years on Renaissance diplomacy, *'Uno Mondo de Carta'* (*'A World of Paper'*). As the book's title suggests, Senatore's focus lies on the documentary organisation of diplomacy. One of the author's main claims is that in the mid fifteenth century the Sforza chancery was first and foremost a high-functioning machine of information gathering and distribution.⁴²

Finally, Marcello Simonetta has studied Cicco Simonetta—the head of the Sforza chancery between 1450 and 1480—as the epitome of the Renaissance secretary, putting him on the same level of Petrarch and Machiavelli.⁴³

With the 'fatal' year 1499, however, the interest in the Sforza chancery almost disappears. There are only two publications exploring the early sixteenth century, and only rather tentatively. Firstly, Leverotti wrote an essay on the chancery's transition from duke Ludovico to king Louis XII, covering the first French domination until 1512.⁴⁴ Secondly, Caterina Santoro published a list of chancery members between 1512 and 1515 in a repertoire of Sforza offices and office-holders.⁴⁵ By contrast, the chancery of Francesco II has never been studied: my thesis will be the first to focus on the last non-

40 Leverotti 1994a, Ead., 2011. For the chancery in the Visconti age see Baroni 1966, Ead. 1977, Ead. 1984.

41 Lazzarini 2001, Ead. 2001a, Ead. 1999.

42 Senatore 1998.

43 Simonetta 2004.

44 Leverotti 2002. In 1966-67, Lidia Cerioni wrote an article on Ludovico's chancery between January and April 1500, four months during which the Sforza party managed to control Milan just before its definitive defeat: Cerioni 1966-67.

45 Santoro 1968, 385-387.

investigated link of a very significant chancery system.

3.5. The case for studying the chancery of Francesco II Sforza

However, this fact alone cannot justify the choice of Francesco II's chancery as my field of investigation. What makes it a truly appealing case study is a series of interconnected elements that have to do with the chancery's characteristics and, more generally, with the context of the Sforza restoration and of early-sixteenth-century Milan.

Firstly, the chancery of Francesco II is structurally suitable for being researched in-depth— as is necessary if I am to focus on concrete chancery practices and on the close analysis of the materiality of chancery documents. Indeed, while the rapidly expanding Sforza chancery of the golden age escapes clear-cut delimitations in size and personnel and that of Massimiliano Sforza is too short-lived to undergo a thorough analysis, Francesco II's chancery represents a convenient middle-ground. Its life spans over fourteen years, long enough to account for change, short enough to avoid generalisations. And even if its dimensions—as we shall see—are contained, they are big enough to display a good degree of complexity.

Secondly, an age of repeated political changes like the Sforza restoration provides a very diverse framework of investigation concentrated in few years. As outlined above, the duke took power in 1522 with remarkable political ambitions; these ambitions crumbled between 1526 and 1530, when he experienced exile; Francesco II eventually returned to Milan as ruler between 1531 and his sudden death in 1535, but the political landscape had irremediably changed and the duke's aspiration were much more limited than before. Each of these phases shows a different posture in the organisation of writing, and we find ourselves in an interesting 'laboratory' for doing documentary history.⁴⁶

Thirdly, with a study of the Sforza restoration, I can contribute to the current re-evaluation of early-sixteenth-century Milan.⁴⁷ Indeed, an anachronistic historiographical prejudice, based on a nationalist attitude towards the loss of independence of the Duchy of Milan, has long dismissed the years 1500–1535 as an embarrassing and uninteresting age; only from the early 2000s this negative approach has started to change.⁴⁸ The two French dominations have undergone a re-discovery that would have been unthinkable

46 Not for nothing, French journal *Laboratoire Italien* ('Italian Laboratory') takes its name from the assumption that Italy is a laboratory for political and social history—not only in the Renaissance.

47 In line with a broader renewal of interest for early modern Milan's history, marked by the appearance of several volumes in English. Two general contributions are Gamberini 2014 and D'Amico 2012. Monographs include De Boer, 2001, Getz 2006 and Stevens (forthcoming).

48 As late as in 1957, the section of the *Storia di Milano* dedicated to the Sforza restoration was anachronistically entitled 'Milan in the last Defence of Italian Liberty.' 'Milano nell'ultima difesa della libertà italiana.' *Storia di Milano*, vol. 8, 241-276.

only twenty years ago.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the *Accademia Ambrosiana*—a leading Milanese institute of historical research—has recently published two volumes analysing institutions, society, religion, literature and arts in early-sixteenth-century Milan.⁵⁰

The main claim underlying this new attitude is that many of the institutional novelties that would characterise early modern Milan until the 1700s originated between 1500 and 1535. Massimo Carlo Giannini and Letizia Arcangeli have demonstrated the latter, substituting the old key-word 'decline' with the more constructive ideas of an ongoing 'political dialectic' and 'experiments of representation and identity' involving Milan, its Duchy and its rising patriciate.⁵¹ Significantly, however, Giannini and Arcangeli exclude the Sforza restoration from their argument. It is as if Francesco II were too compromised with the idea of 'decline' to be re-evaluated. Therefore, one of the basic aims of my dissertation is to demonstrate the revealing potential of a still-neglected period of crisis.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that the first and only monograph centred on Francesco II is as recent as 2005. Even though it is a detailed study of ducal art patronage, the author, Rossana Sacchi, explains that she was forced to act as a political-institutional historian to fill in a series of basic gaps in the history of the Sforza restoration.⁵² Sacchi's effort is indeed remarkable (and I will repeatedly refer to her book throughout the thesis,) but it does not constitute the focus of her study. The only other recent piece of scholarship on Francesco II actually deals with Venetian diplomacy between 1531 and 1533, and—in an old-fashioned manner—has the anachronistic aim of describing 'the agony of the Sforza Duchy.'⁵³

Time has come to carry out a study of the Sforza restoration avoiding hindsight. Francesco II was not the doomed 'last of the Sforza' when he was alive; he was an embattled Renaissance prince whose struggle to maintain authority can teach us much of the importance of chancery personnel and wordpower (see above, pp. 33-34) in securing political power. Precisely because Francesco went through an age of turmoil, we get the chance to observe the continuous construction and de-construction of his chancery. As we shall see, this movement highlights political-administrative (and therefore documentary)

49 Arcangeli 2002, Meschini 2006, Id. 2008, Id., 2014, Contamine 2003, Elsig and Natale 2013, Di Tullio and Fois 2014, Woodcock (forthcoming).

50 Rocca and Vismara 2012, Bellini and Rovetta 2013.

51 Giannini, 2001, Arcangeli 2004. For a general re-evaluation of the Italian Wars, see Mallett and Shaw 2012.

52 Sacchi 2005, vol. 1, 13-14.

53 Olivo 2002. Other than this, the works dealing with Francesco II are three old articles from the journal *Archivio storico lombardo* discussing the guilt or innocence of Francesco II with regard to three political homicides: Romussi 1874, Portioli 1875, Guastella 1948-1949.

dynamics that tend to remain hidden in periods of relative stability like the Sforza golden age. Marco Gentile has recently made a similar point for the age of the last Visconti duke of Milan, Filippo Maria (1412–1447), remarking the 'heuristic potential of periods of conflict' like the transition from the Visconti to the Sforza age. Looking beyond Milan, another example of this attitude can be drawn from the work of Guido Rebecchini, who, focusing on the same critical period of Francesco II, has shed light on the extraordinary—yet in many respects exemplary—profile of Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici (1511–1535).⁵⁴

One last, more general question remains to be addressed: why choose the Duchy of Milan for this dissertation, and not other case studies? What makes Milan and its Duchy a particularly interesting field of investigation for a political and cultural history of chanceries and their production? I have two answers. One is historiographical: despite not being part of the triad of the most-studied Italian Renaissance cities—Venice-Florence-Rome—Milan has long been the testing ground of political historians proposing new models, whether Federico Chabod's bureaucratic state or Giorgio Chittolini's pluralistic regional state. Furthermore, as pointed out above, the DHI too often used Sforza Milan as a representative case study. Therefore, situating in Milan a study that attempts to re-frame Renaissance written political culture allows me to re-evaluate critically all these approaches while also shedding light on the city at an important yet understudied historical juncture.⁵⁵

The second answer points to what Andrea Gamberini has recently defined as 'one of the most characteristic traits' of the state of Milan, if not its very 'distinguishing mark,' namely its strongly polycentric and pluralistic character. In states like the Venetian Terraferma, Florentine Tuscany, and the Papal States, centre-periphery mediation was increasingly monopolised by great families and a well-defined patriciate. Instead, Milan had a peculiarly fragmented political-administrative dynamism. Not only cities, but also smaller towns and villages, communities (of valleys, lakes and parishes,) rural lordships and non-territorial bodies could establish direct links of clientage with the Sforza court and the central authorities. The chancery dealt with this peculiar political landscape, following diverse (and often unpredictable) patterns and strategies. This is why the attempt to historicise document making is more compelling and revealing if tested on the

54 Gentile 2015, 1 and n. 1. Rebecchini 2010.

55 Chabod 1934, Id. 1971, Id. 1971a. A fundamental essay of Chittolini dealing with the fragmentation of the Sforza Duchy is Chittolini 1982. Not coincidentally, Chittolini's studies have opened a long (and still ongoing) debate on the fragmentation of the Duchy of Milan (more urban-based or more feudal-based?). Some examples are Della Misericordia 1998-1999, Gentile 2000, Arcangeli 2003, Gamberini 2009.

Duchy of Milan.⁵⁶

4. The sources

Before concluding this introduction with the outline of the thesis structure, there is yet one overview to provide: that of the sources I am going to use. Being a study of the Sforza chancery, the core of the sources for this dissertation is to be found in Milan's State Archives.

4.1. The organisation of Sforza sources in Milan's State Archives

Milan's State Archives house an archive called *Sforzesco*. It is divided in four major series called *Registri delle Missive* ('Registers of Letters Missive'), *Registri Ducali* ('Ducal Registers'), *Carteggio Interno* ('Internal Correspondence') and *Carteggio Estero* ('Foreign Correspondence'). For a detailed description of the *Registri delle Missive* and the *Registri Ducali* see 4.3 and 4.4 below. The *Carteggio Interno* and the *Carteggio Estero* preserve the incoming and outgoing correspondence between the Sforza leadership and its interlocutors within and outside the Duchy of Milan: the incoming documents are original letters, whereas the outgoing documents are drafts of the letters the chancery dispatched.

However, contrary to what its name suggests, the *Sforzesco* cannot be considered as the actual 'archive of the Sforza.' Instead, it is a recent creation, by early-twentieth-century archivists who followed convenient (yet very arbitrary) criteria. They aimed at remedying the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century dismemberment of the original Sforza archive, promoted by three generations of archivists who were among the most enthusiastic supporters of ordering the archives 'by-subject' (in Italian *ordinamento per materia*). The *ordinamento per materia* advocated the mixing of documents coming from different archives into new collections organised following artificial categories, which were thought to make the research quicker and easier for administrative (and, later, historical-scientific) use. In contemporary Archival Science the *ordinamento per materia* is now deemed totally inadequate, mainly because it makes much more difficult to understand the historical evolution of an archive over time. The method in use today is indeed called 'historical method' (*metodo storico*) and advocates the maintenance (as far as reasonably possible) of the archives' original order.⁵⁷

Today, as a result of these archival operations and counter-operations, Sforza documents are scattered in many different archival series, each one with its own

⁵⁶ See Gamberini 2014a, especially pp. 13-15 (citations at page 13).

⁵⁷ The most complete article on the application of the *ordinamento per materia* in late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Milan is Bologna 1997.

anachronistic logic and bias. On the one hand, the four series of the *Sforzesco* were created with the strong 'statist' bias typical of the early-twentieth century, imagining that all registers and letters emanated from (and converged to) a single and well-identifiable centre of Sforza power. On the other hand, the series created following the *ordinamento per materia* are divided in two major archives—the *Atti di Governo* ('Governmental Acts') and the *Diplomatico* ('Diplomatic Archive')—and bear names like *Acque* ('Waters'), *Commercio* ('Commerce'), *Finanze* ('Financial Affairs'), *Famiglie* ('Families'), *Comuni* ('Municipalities'), *Autografi* ('Autographs'), all betraying the taxonomic tendencies of positivism.⁵⁸

Questions related to the turmoil of the Sforza restoration add to this troublesome archival situation. For the years of Francesco II, we lack all the *Carteggio Estero* between 1522 and 1525; as we shall see, documentation for the study of the duke's exiled years (1526–1530) is scarce; and generally speaking, the *Carteggio Interno* has several gaps.

Despite these issues—which all in all are inherent in doing research—I retrace the history of the Sforza chancery under Francesco II with a good level of detail by using a variety of sources that have survived in Milan's State Archives (and elsewhere, see 4.7 and 4.8). In the next few pages, I will provide a basic contextualisation of the materials I have used most systematically.

4.2. The chancery ruoli

Among my main sources are the chancery *ruoli*—lists recording the names of chancery members paid for their services. The *ruoli* are the most direct way of identifying who was active in the chancery at a given time, and of reconstructing the network of chancery members during the Sforza restoration.

Unproblematic as they may look at first glance, the *ruoli* are not easy to find and use. As far as their preservation is concerned, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century archivists filed them in (at least) four different series belonging to two separate archives. In the *Atti di Governo* archive, they are to be found in the series named *Finanze* and *Uffici e Tribunali Regi* ('Royal Offices and Courts'); in the *Sforzesco* archive, more *ruoli* occasionally surface from the *Registri delle Missive*. In total, I could find seven *ruoli* produced at the time of Francesco II. One of them belongs to the *Registri delle Missive* and dates 14 September 1525. Another one is to be found in the *Uffici e Tribunali Regi*

⁵⁸ For a detailed archival description of the *Sforzesco* archive, of the *Atti di Governo* archive and of the *Diplomatico* archive, see *GGAS*, vol. 2 (1983), 926-928, 913-923, 902-913 respectively.

series of the *Atti di Governo*, and dates 20 October 1525.⁵⁹ The five remaining *ruoli* are preserved in the *Finanze* series of the *Atti di Governo*. They are undated, but, as I have reconstructed, they were drawn between 1531 and 1537.⁶⁰

There are two problems in the use of *ruoli* as sources. Firstly, they do not list all the members of the chancery, but only those who were paid on one specific occasion. Payments normally occurred at irregular intervals, and the *ruoli* often report the distribution of extra benefits—typically quotas of salt. Therefore, finding a *ruolo* listing ten names does not mean that the chancery had ten members in total, but that at least ten people were active in the chancery in that moment. Ascertaining that moment is the second problem, because many *ruoli*—as pointed out above—are undated. Dating, then, requires a certain amount of detective work. Knowing the date of death of a chancery member sets a *terminus ante quem*; in addition, following the promotions of coadjutors to clerks and of clerks to secretaries at least helps establish the chronological order of the undated *ruoli*.⁶¹

Indeed, a very useful feature of the *ruoli* is that they always signal the members' position in the chancery hierarchy. Names are normally followed by roles (*secretario*, *cancelliere*, *coadiutore* and so forth); when the latter are missing, the hierarchy can be reconstructed by looking at the amounts of money (or salt) paid to each person. Thus, reordering the *ruoli* in chronological order is an excellent way to trace the career of chancery members.

4.3. *The Registri delle Missive*

The *Registri delle Missive* are the chancery copybooks: they gather the transcripts of the letters close that the chancery sent to Sforza subjects—peripheral officers, communities, individuals—in chronological order. There are six surviving registers from the period of Francesco II, covering the years 1522–1525 and 1530–1535.⁶²

The *Registri delle Missive* will represent a key-source for this thesis, in three respects. Firstly, together with the *ruoli*, the *Registri delle Missive* will allow me to discover the identity of chancery members. This is because, each register entry bears the signature of the *primo segretario* or *Gran Cancelliere* (in the bottom-left corner); the

59 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 223, l. 74, 1525 September 14; ASMi, *Atti di Governo, Uffici e Tribunali Regi Parte Antica*, 86, 1525 October 20. The *ruolo* in the *Registri delle Missive* is actually a list of chancery members who were exempted from the payment of taxes in the city of Milan.

60 ASMi, *Atti di Governo, Finanza Parte Antica*, 857.

61 Downgrades must in fact have been rare: if for any reason a chancery member was to downgrade, then the best solution was relocating him to the chancery of a less important office, or ousting him directly. See Leverotti 1994a, 323.

62 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220-225.

signature of the secretary who was responsible for the production of the correspondent document (bottom-right corner); and the signature of the chancery clerk who materially wrote the original document (bottom-centre, or bottom-right corner under the secretary) (fig. I.5, p. 43). Thus, browsing the registers allows the researcher to compensate for some of the blind spots of the *ruoli*. Secondly, the *Registri delle Missive* shed light on many aspects of the organisation, language, and governance failures of the chancery, thus providing an accurate picture of its functioning, ambitions, and limits. Thirdly, I will rely on the contents of the letters transcribed in the registers to study how outsiders were able to influence document making.

4.4. The Registri Ducali

The *Registri Ducali*, unlike the *Registri delle Missive*, typically record governmental acts: documents with a juridical value, not letters that the recipient could reply to. Given the artificial nature of the *Sforzesco* (explained above), the series preserves a very diverse ensemble of registers: some originated from various branches of the Sforza chancery; some others originally belonged to different magistracies under Sforza control. They are more numerous than the *Registri delle Missive*.⁶³

As demonstrated in introducing the history of the Sforza chancery during the golden age (pp. 32-33), analysing the organisation of the *Registri Ducali* is essential to detect the chancery structure. Furthermore, as we shall see, the contents of the acts can shed light on the array of privileged relations and special businesses that bound the duke and his chancery's members in ways that were much more complex than mere 'clerical' transactions.

Generally speaking, I will not exploit the *Registri Ducali* as systematically as the *Registri delle Missive*. Nevertheless, they will offer some precious evidence throughout the whole dissertation.

4.5. The chancery Ordines

The *Ordines* are a set of chancery regulations compiled between 1453 and 1475, and gathered in three manuscripts preserved in Milan: one housed at the State Archives (ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 214), one at the Ambrosiana Library (BAMi, *Ambr. Z 198 Sup.*), and one at the Trivulziana Library (BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325).

Although they do not belong to the period of Francesco II, the *Ordines* represent an excellent source to grasp the mismatch between the apparent solidity of the chancery

63 ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 26, 47, 68-82, 93-95, 138-142, 193, 194, 202, 210.

Referendario ~~Cremona~~
 Ab Agentibus noie hominu terre noie Pice
 leonis supplicationem accepimus: cuius
 exemplum his inclusum ad vos mittimus
 et quia honestu est qd sup^{ks} tot damna
 pro nobis passi assignatas sibi contributiones
 assequantur vobis dicimus qd eas exigatis
 et supplicantibus persolvatis M^o Junij
 Junij . M . D . XXV
 Visa H Moronus
 Bart Roz
 Per Paravisinum

Fig. I.5: ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 222, 1525 June 18. Typical entry from the *Registri delle Missive*. On the bottom-left corner of the entry, there is the signature of *Gran Cancelliere* Girolamo Morone (*Visa H Moronus*); on the bottom-right corner, the signature of *primo segretario* Bartolomeo Rozzoni (*Bart^s Roz^s*); underneath the latter, the signature of the clerk who materially wrote the letter, Agostino Parravicini (*Per Paravisinum*)

structure and the fluidity of chancery practices. More specifically, I will offer a new reading of the regulations, arguing that the anxiety to normalise the activity of the chancery is in fact a very good vantage point from which appreciate the chancery unruliness.

4.6. *The memoir Informazioni sulle incombenze dei segretari ducali*

The memoir *Informazioni sulle incombenze dei segretari ducali* ('Information about the Tasks of the Ducal Secretaries') is—as I will demonstrate—an early-sixteenth-century account of the functioning of the Sforza chancery. It complements the insights coming from the *Ordines*, and I will use it to show that the chancery was a complex association rather than a neutral 'office' for documentary production; furthermore, I will explain why I believe it was written, for practical reasons, at the beginning of Francesco II's reign.

Unfortunately, the original memoir is not extant: it was included in a manuscript of the Trivulziana Library (either *Cod. Triv.* 171 or *Cod. Triv.* 172) that was destroyed during the Second World War bombings on Milan. The memoir's text survives in two transcriptions that appeared in the journal *Archivio storico lombardo* in 1881 and 1939, when Sforza scholar Caterina Santoro gave the text its modern title.⁶⁴

4.7. *Sforza chancery letters close*

Since the materiality of chancery products will be one of the main focuses of my dissertation, I will also need to leave Milan and analyse original Sforza chancery documents in the archives of their recipients. To study the materiality of letters close, I will move to two northern-Italian archives: that of the Gonzaga (*Archivio Gonzaga*), housed in Mantua; and that of the prince-bishop of Trent, Bernardo Cles (*Corrispondenza Clesiana*), housed in Trent.⁶⁵ The first is the archive with the highest number of letters close coming from the chancery of Francesco II; the second preserves a special collection of Sforza chancery letters, because special was the relationship between the duke and Cles (see pp. 154-155).

4.8. *Sforza chancery letters patent*

For the study of the other main typology of Sforza chancery documents—letters patent—I will turn back to Milan to examine two collections: one is to be found at Milan State Archives, and is named *Diplomi e Dispacci Sovrani* ('Sovereign Diplomas and

⁶⁴ Porro Lambertenghi 1881, Santoro 1939, 39-43.

⁶⁵ ASMn, *Archivio Gonzaga, Dipartimento di Affari Esteri, Milano, Lettere dei Signori di Milano ai Gonzaga, 1616-1618*; ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10.

Dispatches'); the other, called *Cimeli* ('Memorabilia'), is housed in Milan's *Archivio Storico Civico* (Municipal Historical Archives).⁶⁶

5. Thesis structure

In order to link the 'macro'-problems I discussed in the opening sections of this introduction with the 'micro'-problems relating to my case study—the chancery of Francesco II—the thesis structure will follow the three main themes that emerged from the general research questions (pp. 15-18). Therefore, the thesis is divided into three parts, each one further divided in two chapters. Firstly, I study the system of Francesco II's chancery; secondly, I analyse chancery practices; thirdly, I carry out a material analysis of Sforza documents: the chancery products.

In Part I, 'The Chancery System,' I throw light on the four most essential features of the chancery as they change throughout the different phases of the Sforza restoration. In Chapter 1, I discuss the chancery structure, size, and hierarchy—the raw wordpower of Francesco II. In Chapter 2, I analyse the networks of chancery members. Displaying these data serves three purposes. The first is laying the essential frame of reference to orientate the rest of the thesis—explaining some basic concepts and chancery terminology, and introducing the characters that will come up more regularly. The second purpose is analysing the Sforza restoration through the perspective of the chancery—that is, showing how the changes in chancery organisation reflect and explain the ever-changing strategies and ambitions of Francesco. The third purpose is offering a social history of the chancery network. As we shall see, secretaries and clerks did not have a simply clerical—bureaucratic, impersonal—relation with power. They belonged to a resilient group of Sforza supporters who brought their whole socio-political capital at court, often having significant economic ties with the duke. Realising this means beginning to problematise the very idea of the chancery as institution. To what extent can the chancery be considered a mere bureaucratic 'office.'

This question is the starting point of Part II, 'Chancery Practices,' and I answer it by observing the concrete dynamics through which the chancery operated. Chapter 3 studies the social, political, and cultural practice that were undertaken in the chancery. Firstly, from a social point of view, I raise a problem that, banal as it may seem, is mostly unaddressed by scholarship: was secrecy the main characteristic of the self-styled *secret* chancery (*cancellaria secreta*)? Was the chancery a monastic-like scriptorium? In other

⁶⁶ ASMi, *Diplomatico, Diplomi e Dispacci Sovrani, Milano*, 13; ASCMi, *Cimeli*.

words: how clear-cut was the separation between chancery insiders and outsiders? Secondly, from a more specifically political point of view, I argue that looking at the role of the chancery in the management of flows of information and communication at the Sforza court is bound to further problematise its status. We usually think of the chancery as an office just providing a documentary output, but was it actually the case? Was document making strictly separated from more political activities like information gathering and decision making, and from the world of the court? Finally, from a cultural point of view, I make an overview of the *non*-administrative activities of the chancery. Was the chancery only a centre of political-administrative documentary production, or was it—more generally—a centre of writing? Did chancery members see themselves only as writers at the service of their master, the duke, or did they behave like a self-standing community in a broader sense?

The aim of all these questions is rethinking the most basic framework of written political culture through which we interpret the chancery. Following up in this matter, in Chapter 4 ('The Practice of Centre-Periphery Correspondence'), I will re-frame as a self-standing and meaningful practice an activity that is usually treated as purely logistical and perfectly neutral: the deployment of chancery documents around the Duchy of Milan. Why did Francesco II invest great amounts of money to reach the Duchy's periphery with his letters? Was it only for strictly administrative reasons, or was it also the performance of a symbolic act? Answering this question, too, contributes to re-thinking the chancery and its documents. For example, it lays the ground for a more critical approach to the language of chancery products.

'Chancery Products' is also the title of Part III, which brings all the claims made throughout the previous chapters together, to analyse documents on a material level. Part III studies how chancery practices affected the very form of chancery documents; and, vice versa, how studying the form of chancery documents can help us refine the knowledge of chancery practices. In this part I wish to demonstrate the new diplomatics I introduced above (pp. 16-17): a material analysis of documents that does not just describe their authoritative final aspect, but gets us into the socio-political complexities of the plural process of their making. Building upon Le Goff's *Documento/monumento*, I approach documents as assemblages in the attempt to de-construct their production and understand better their true meaning and functions.

I test my method on two basic typologies of chancery documents. Chapter 5 is devoted to what diplomatics defines as 'letters close'—that is, informative letters normally

used for correspondence;⁶⁷ Chapter 6 is devoted to letters patent—documents establishing juridical acts. In both cases, it is the authorship of the documents that falls under scrutiny. Firstly, as far as letters close are concerned, what emerges is the tension between the institutional epistolary authorship of Francesco II, shared among many characters, and the personal epistolary authorship of Francesco II, expressed graphically in various ways. Secondly, in the analysis of letters patent, what stands out— as in the case of the Taverna charter—is the mismatch between the solemn monumentality of the finished products and the complex, collaborative processes that led to their creation. My use of material culture to interpret written culture problematises the very meaning of chancery documents: to what extent were documents channels for the top-down imposition of authority coming from a well-defined sovereign, and to what extent were they instead open and participatory platforms? Not coincidentally, there is a strong parallel between this last question and those discussed in dealing with chancery practices in Part II.

In the last chapter ('The Chancery from Outside: Documentary Interaction') I finally abandon a perspective internal to the chancery, and I analyse the chancery as seen from the point of view of outsiders. What attitude did peripheral officers, subject communities and individual subjects have toward the chancery and its documents? Were they acquiescent to the documentary strategies of the central authorities, or did they respond with documentary tactics? The clash between strategies (understood as the aims of practices undertaken from above) and tactics (the aims of practices undertaken from below) frames my final effort to understand the meaning of documents in relation to what happened around them.⁶⁸ Can we understand the documents coming from the authorities without considering their reception?

Ultimately, what I want to achieve with this dissertation is a first cultural history of the institutions that oversaw the production of political-administrative documents, and of the political-administrative documents themselves—a history that does not take chancery documents as mere containers of historical evidence and their production as a trans-historical phenomenon, but one that approaches these elements as a means better to understand power, authority and society. It is, in a sense, a micro-history, because it is committed to the close study of its objects (chanceries and their documents) in their precise historical context, as an antidote to a certain teleology of political and institutional

67 *VID*, 99: 'a letter through which a person, public or private, communicates with another in order to inform her of something, to ask her information, to explain her something, to ask her to do something or to send for her' [my translation]

68 For the strategy-tactic couple, originally elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau, see Burke 2008, 80-81.

history and—more generally—as a critical response to a face-value acceptance of the documents' purported message. I hope that, like the most inspired micro-histories, this dissertation will help rethink broad historical problems and eventually promote their analysis on a larger scale.

Part I – The Chancery System

In the first part of this dissertation, I will delineate the fundamental characteristics of the Sforza chancery under Francesco II. The questionnaire I am going to test on the evidence includes the most basic issues to tackle in approaching a chancery: how was the chancery structured? What was the size of the chancery? What was its internal hierarchy, and how was labour divided? And, shifting the focus from the infrastructural features of the chancery to its personnel: who were the chancery members? Where did they come from? Is it possible to find a clear rationale behind their presence in the chancery?

The answers to these questions will have two constants. On the one hand, I will continuously compare the emerging characteristics of Francesco II's chancery with those of the Sforza chancery during the golden age.¹ Indeed, in order to measure both the ambitions and the limits of the Sforza restoration, it is important to highlight continuities and discontinuities in a diachronic framework. On the other, my analysis will always follow the three phases I have identified in the history of Francesco as duke of Milan, which are very different from each other. The first phase, from the recapturing of the Duchy to the arrest of Girolamo Morone for the alleged conspiracy against Charles V (April 1522–October 1525), was characterised by high ambitions in the face of a very difficult political and military situation. The second phase—the exiled years in south-eastern Lombardy (Summer 1526–January 1530)—saw the inevitable downsizing of the Sforza political-administrative apparatus. The final phase, from the re-investiture of Francesco as duke of Milan to his sudden death (January 1530–October 1535), was marked by relative stability: however, this derived from the politically very cumbersome protection of Charles V. How did the chancery's structure and men adapt to reflect these changes?

As anticipated in the thesis structure, the reconstruction of the Sforza chancery under Francesco II serves three purposes. The first is outlining the essential contours of my object of study: in discussing the chancery structure (Chapter 1) and networks (Chapter 2) I present a series of concepts, elements and characters that are going to come up repeatedly in the dissertation.

The second purpose is carrying out a documentary history of the Sforza

¹ Regarding this question, it is also useful to make here a quick preliminary note: when I mention 'Francesco II' (usually at the first appearance in a paragraph), 'Francesco' (usually from the second appearance in a paragraph onwards), and (less frequently) 'the duke,' I am always referring to the person of Francesco II Sforza; when I mention 'the Sforza,' I am always referring to the Sforza dynasty as a whole.

restoration—that is, analysing the organisation of the Sforza chancery as a means to improve our understanding of the political ambitions and limits of Francesco II. This part of the inquiry allows me to engage with the most recent historiography on early-sixteenth-century Milan, which currently is re-evaluating the Italian-Wars decades as a period of experimentation (rather than of mere trouble); but it also allows me to shed new light on the period, insofar as scholars have systematically excluded Francesco from such re-evaluation (see above, pp. 35-38).

The third purpose, which relates most closely to the overriding argument of the thesis, is to question the idea of the chancery as a strictly bureaucratic office. I shall achieve this by switching the focus from the more formal and rigid features of the chancery (structure, size, official hierarchy, analysed in Chapter 1) to the more informal and flexible mechanisms and networks (analysed in Chapter 2) through which the chancery actually functioned. As we shall see, chancery members interpreted their role in ways that cannot be defined as clerical. They had a surprisingly complex relationship with the duke and the Sforza court, and they owed their membership of the chancery to family or personal ties much more than to technical expertise in writing. Can we afford to overlook this framework of Renaissance written political culture, so distant from the principles of bureaucracy, when we hold a document coming from a chancery? My starting research hypothesis was that looking at what happened behind and around chancery documents can offer a new and compelling perspective on Renaissance political and institutional history. With these first two chapters, we already start to explore this possibility.

Chapter 1 – The Chancery Structure

1. The chancery structure

The structure of Francesco II's chancery is best reconstructed through the analysis of the organisation of the registers it produced, the *Registri delle Missive* and the *Registri Ducali*. In order to detect the existence of self-standing chancery branches, it is necessary to look at the signatures under each register entry. If one secretary tends to monopolise a series of registers with a clear thematic rationale, and his name does not appear (or seldom appears) in other series, then he is likely to have been the head of a chancery branch. This is the method Franca Leverotti has used in order to identify the appearance (or disappearance) of different branches before 1487, when a chancery member (Tristano Calco) eventually compiled the first known organic description of the chancery, explicitly listing its four parts: political branch, beneficial branch, judicial branch, and financial branch.² For Francesco II's period, we do not have any such description of the chancery, but we can adopt Leverotti's method.

1.1. Ambition: May 1522-October 1525

Francesco II first returned to Milan as duke on 4 April 1522, and in May began to re-organise the institutional order of the Duchy. We have already seen (p. 31) that on 18 May he issued the *Constitutio*, a highly programmatic document in which he communicated his political agenda and confirmed the institution of the Senate. There is no mention of the chancery in the *Constitutio*, but a letter dating from 28 May testifies that Francesco was already working on the organisation of his wordpower: he wrote to the *Maestri delle Entrate Straordinarie* (literally 'Masters of the Extraordinary Income,' a magistracy in charge of financial affairs) inviting them to obey the 'confirmed and newly appointed' Giovanni Giacomo Ferrufini, defined as 'secretary for the matters concerning our income' (*secretario sopra le cose de le intrate nostre*).³ Therefore, the Sforza chancery had a financial branch. This fact is also confirmed by the existence of a register, bearing the modern title 'Fiscal Affairs' (*Affari Fiscali*), in which the majority of the entries show the signature of Ferrufini.⁴

Moreover, the existence of a political branch—the heart of the Sforza chancery—is immediately recognizable from the four extant *Registri delle Missive* covering the years

2 Leverotti 1994a, 310-321. Tristano Calco's description of the chancery was part of a wider account of the entire Sforza administrative structure, that Calco had prepared for the use of a Venetian ambassador. BAV, *Vaticano Latino* 3923, ll. 74-114 (for the part on the chancery ll. 81-88).

3 ASMi, *Registri ducali*, 210, l. 3.

4 ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 26

between 1522 and 1525 (nn. 220–223). In these registers, the signature of secretary Bartolomeo Rozzoni is to be found under almost all the acts recorded, whereas three other secretaries—Giorgio Gadio, Giovanni Stefano Robbio, and Giovanni Angelo Ricci—appear more occasionally. The case of register 221, for example, is emblematic: the signature of Rozzoni appears under hundreds of entries except only one (9 April 1525), signed by Robbio. Hence, the political branch of the chancery was certainly directed by Bartolomeo Rozzoni.

Finally, two registers belonging to the *Registri Ducali* series, covering the whole Sforza restoration and preserved under the modern title 'Ecclesiastical benefices' (*Benefizi Ecclesiastici*, 1522-1525)⁵ and 'Benefices' (*Benefici*, 1525-1535)⁶ are the key for detecting the existence of a beneficial chancery. Indeed, the registers always bear continuous series of signatures of one single secretary who clearly specialised in ecclesiastical benefices: fixed capital assets endowed to church offices, whose distribution was crucial for maintaining a political clientele. Between 1522 and 1525 beneficial secretary was Giorgio Gadio, whose signature recurs throughout the entire register entitled *Benefizi Ecclesiastici*.

A political branch directed by Bartolomeo Rozzoni, a beneficial branch directed by Giorgio Gadio, and a financial branch directed by Giovanni Giacomo Ferrufini: the similarity with the chancery structure of the Sforza golden age cannot be a coincidence (figg. 1.1, 1.2, p. 53). When Francesco II structured his wordpower, he clearly chose continuity with the past. Such choice not only was an administrative measure, but also a strong political statement: Francesco signalled that he wanted to rule as incisively as Ludovico Sforza and his predecessors.

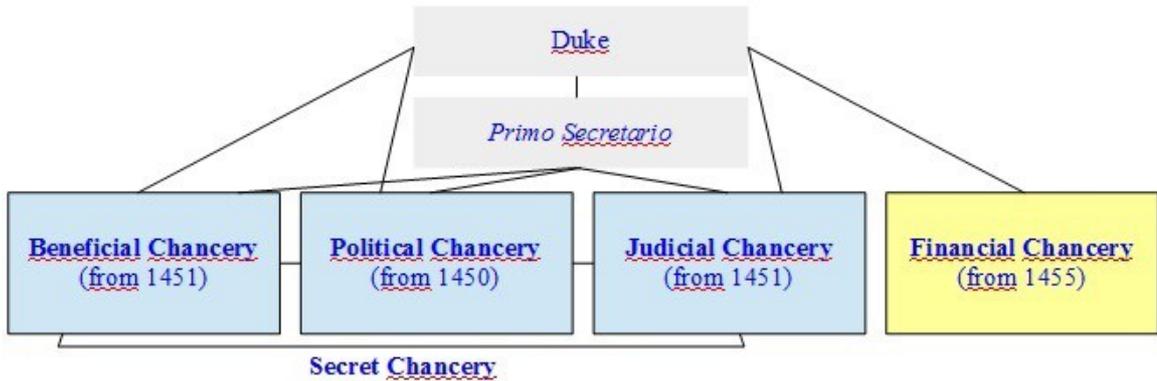
And yet, an important discontinuity is also apparent: the judicial branch disappeared. Two elements allow to affirm it. Firstly, in the registers belonging to the Sforza restoration, some affairs that should logically belong to the domain of a judicial secretary (such as graces and safe-conducts) are to be found mixed with matters of other kinds (donations, concessions, appointment to offices) under the control of political secretary Bartolomeo Rozzoni. Secondly, I was unable to find registers showing the prevalence of the signatures of a fourth secretary besides Rozzoni, Gadio, or Ferrufini.

The disappearance of the judicial branch could have been caused by the combination of two factors. One is the confirmation, in the *Constitutio*, of the French-founded Senate of Milan as the most important assembly of the Duchy (see p. 31). Since

5 ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 73.

6 ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 84.

Chancery Structure, 1455–1499



Chancery Structure, April 1522–October 1525



Fig. 1.1, 1.2: The four-branch structure of the Sforza chancery during the golden age (1455– 1499) and the three-branch structure of the April 1522–October 1525 period

the Senate was first and foremost a tribunal that dealt with the administration of justice, its rising power could have eroded the prerogatives of the duke, making the establishment of a judicial branch of the secret chancery unnecessary. The other factor is that the judicial branch normally managed a great share of the flow of petitions, which generated relevant income from the issue of documents on request (the *rescritti*). Francesco II, always in financial need, could have decided to channel that money directly in his hands, or at least to have as few intermediaries as possible. Not for nothing, according to Nadia Covini, even during the golden age, *primo segretario* Cicco Simonetta took control of the judicial chancery between 1464 and 1468 (see p. 34) primarily because he aimed at controlling its profits.⁷

To sum up, the documentary history of the first phase of the Sforza restoration shows two interestingly opposing tendencies. On the one hand, Francesco II had been remarkably determined to re-establish a chancery on the model of the 'heights' of the golden age, thus showing the ambition to impose his wordpower as his illustrious predecessors did. On the other hand, Francesco had to adapt to a difficult political situation: competition from the Senate, together with financial difficulties, probably caused the disappearance of the judicial branch of the chancery.

1.2. Emergency: Summer 1526-January 1530

As anticipated in the introduction (p. 31), things could have started to change after the battle of Pavia (24 February 1525), as the end of the French presence on Lombard soil seemed to inaugurate an age of stability. However, eight months later (October 1525) *Gran Cancelliere* Girolamo Morone was arrested for an alleged conspiracy against Charles V, and the duke began his exiled years (Summer 1526–January 1530). What happened to the Sforza chancery during this troubled period?

Understandably, the years of exile—which the duke mostly spent between the towns of Lodi and Cremona—are strongly characterised by a dearth of documentation. A gap in the *Registri delle Missive* between October 1525 (the end of register n. 223) and January 1529 (the inception of register n. 224) is especially problematic, because it is impossible to follow the day-to-day activity of the chancery. Establishing whether the intervening registers have gone lost or just never existed is difficult, because different elements point to opposite answers. Register n. 223 stops two days before the arrest of Girolamo Morone (13 October 1525), which indicates that the chancery ceased to update it as soon as Francesco II was besieged with his most faithful men in the castle of Milan.

⁷ Covini 2002a, 116.

This fact is logical and inevitable, since Francesco was probably unable to send messages regularly from his residence-prison. But did the chancery start new *Registri delle Missive* when the duke eventually began his exile in South-eastern Lombardy (Summer 1526)? On the one hand, we know that the chancery tended to stop transcribing letters in the registers when the political situation was particularly critical—registers n. 221 and n. 222 show a parallel gap between October 1524 and February 1525, coinciding with the last French invasion—and this could well have happened also between 1526 and 1530. On the other hand, the beginning date of *Registri delle Missive* n. 224 (January 1529) does not seem to correspond to any important event motivating the inception of a new register. In other words, it looks as if register 224 followed up on another (or more) register(s), now lost.

What is sure is that the duke and his entourage operated in a situation of emergency. From this point of view, it is quite emblematic that Francesco II's headquarters in Lodi and in the small town of Soncino were the local Dominican and Carmelite convents respectively: monasteries were indeed a typical 'free zone' for travellers, pilgrims, and refugees.⁸ Moreover, and vice versa, the fact that an exiled government chose Dominicans and Carmelites as protectors and providers of space from which to govern demonstrates the great political influence (and engagement) of mendicant orders.

And yet, a form of governance certainly continued. An external source like the *Commemoriali* registers of the Republic of Venice provides some precious hints on the composition of Francesco II's inner circle during the exile. Francesco and the Venetians notarised a series of deeds during this period, and the witnesses to these acts compose a network of notables that was still around Francesco, both politically and physically. There are officers (Girolamo Brebbia, Giovanni Battista Speciano, Girolamo Marinoni, Giacomo Filippo Sacchi), courtiers (Massimiliano Stampa, Ludovico Affaitati), physicians (Francesco Appiani, Scipione Vegio), and bankers (Domenico Sauli).⁹

More importantly, in one act dated 15 May 1528, witnesses Giacomo Filippo Sacchi and Giovanni Battista Speciano are described as 'President of the Senate' and

⁸ The Dominican convent of Lodi is defined as 'the residence of the duke' in *I libri Commemoriali 1876–1924*, vol. 6 (1904), 200 (document n. 71); for the relationship between Francesco II and the Carmelites of Soncino see Sacchi 2005, vol. 1, 124–133. On the systematic penetration of the secular world into the sacred in the medieval and early modern world, see Hamilton and Spicer 2005, 10–14. On late-medieval London friaries as catalysts for alien communities, see Colson 2010. On living in exile in Renaissance Italy see Shaw 2000, especially Ch. 4, 'Life in Exile.'

⁹ *I libri Commemoriali 1876–1924*, vol. 6 (1904), 195 (doc. 58), 200 (doc. 71), 201 (doc. 75), 203 (doc. 81).

'Senator' respectively.¹⁰ This fact is very interesting, because the Spanish-imperial party that was occupying Milan set up a new Senate in 1527; to my knowledge, historiography has normally considered this last Senate as the only existing assembly, but neither Sacchi nor Speciano belonged to it—and Sacchi did not figure as President of the Senate before 1526.¹¹ Therefore, a 'shadow' pro-Sforza Senate was probably assisting the duke in Lodi and Cremona, and it is no coincidence that both Sacchi and Speciano would continue their career after Francesco II's return, respectively as President of the Senate and as *Capitano di Giustizia* (literally 'Captain of Justice').

The chancery mirrored this political-administrative context—certainly critical and informal, but also undoubtedly functioning. The political branch of the secret chancery may have regressed to a small group of secretaries surrounding the duke—probably no more than three or four at a time —¹²but it was nonetheless able to cope with what remained of internal affairs: indeed, the *Sforzesco* archive preserves a number of *Registri Ducali* covering the timespan between 1526 and 1530, demonstrating how the chancery kept making appointments to offices and ecclesiastical benefices, issued safe-conducts, and so forth. Furthermore, the chancery managed to keep vital diplomatic contacts with the anti-imperial allies (Rome, Venice, Paris) and, less easily, with the imperial court, Spain, and London.¹³

Unfortunately, the lack of *Registri delle Missive* makes it impossible to establish whether there was still a proper hierarchy of clerks and coadjutors (see pp. 75-77) working under the secretaries. The downsizing of the chancery also makes it difficult to understand whether the political, beneficial, and financial branch were still divided. The register of benefices of the period shows that one of the most prominent secretaries of the political branch, Giovanni Angelo Ricci, regularly signed the acts between November 1527 and October 1529, thus suggesting that the political branch had the management of ecclesiastical affairs for a couple of years.¹⁴ From October 1529, the beneficial branch became self-standing, because the name of the apostolic protonotary Giacomo Picenardi is always to be found at the bottom of the registered documents, and he seldom took part

10 *Ivi*, 200 (doc. 71).

11 The document erecting the new 'Spanish' Senate was edited in Landus 1637, 153-160. For the full list of its members, see p. 155. Between May 1522 and October 1525, President of the Senate had been Francesco Marliani: *ivi*, 144-145.

12 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 224 shows that four secretaries signed documents throughout 1529: Bartolomeo Rozzoni, Giovanni Angelo Ricci, Camillo Ghilini.

13 ASMi, *Carteggio Estero, Roma*, 135-138; *Venezia*, 1275-77; *Francia*, 560; *Alemagna*, 590-591; *Aragona e Spagna*, 655; *Spagna*, 1336; *Inghilterra e Scozia*, 568.

14 ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 84, ll. 46-102.

in the work of the political branch.¹⁵ As far as the financial branch of the chancery is concerned, I was unable to find registers under the control of Giovanni Giacomo Ferrufini (or of one likely to be his successor,) but it is impossible to tell whether this is due to archival loss or to the actual disappearance of the branch (fig. 1.3, p. 58).

These archival limitations notwithstanding, one thing is certain: Francesco II may have not been master of his own political fate, but his documentary posture demonstrates that he continued to consider himself a ruler. The Sforza chancery did not implode, but adapted to an emergency situation in the best possible way, waiting for better times.

1.3. Re-positioning: January 1530–November 1535

Such better times came when Charles V issued the diploma that re-invested Francesco II as duke of Milan, on 2 January 1530.¹⁶ However, the third, relatively stable phase of the Sforza restoration actually started only fifteen months later. In March 1531, Francesco ratified a full list of magistracies and office-holders (1 March),¹⁷ and was able to re-enter the castle of Milan (15 March), which gradually became his princely residence.¹⁸

Very significantly, the value of this moment as a turning point is demonstrated by a *documentary* fact: Francesco II marked his return to the castle of Milan with the decision of moving his most important *writings* there. This is testified by a letter to *primo segretario* Bartolomeo Rozzoni, dated 14 March 1531 and bound in a manuscript of Milan's Ambrosiana Library:

We ship you some writings of ours in this sack, [and] you will see that they are described in the attached list. And given that it is inappropriate to move things like these too often from one place to another, we think it advisable to find an appropriate place to archive these and similar writings; and we think that an apt place, if you agree with us, would be our usual old little Archive (*solito vecchio Archivietto*) in our castle of Milan. Go have a look, and if you think it is appropriate, put it in order and store there all these writings, and do the same with the important writings that will deserve careful preservation in the future. And it would be useful to transcribe them, and to make *copie autentiche* [copies with a legal value, authenticated by a notary] to be stored in the chancery, so that they will be ready to use when needed.¹⁹

15 *Ibid.*, ll. 103-154.

16 The original document is preserved in ASMi, *Cimeli*, 3. Unfortunately, however, the *Cimeli* series was excluded from consultation due to administrative reasons throughout my whole doctorate.

17 ASMi, *Atti di governo, Uffici e Tribunali Regi, Parte Antica*, 7, 1531 March 1.

18 Rossana Sacchi describes the refurbishment and decoration of the castle in detail: Sacchi 2005, vol. 1, 133-146.

19 BAMi, *L 44 inf. (5)*, l. 40: ‘Vi mandamo in una saccozza alcune scritture nostre, de quali ne vederete li titoli in l'inclusa lista. Et perché non sono cose da molto muovere da loco a loco, ne pare sia buono a ritrovare qualche loco idoneo ad essere a queste et similaltre scritture Archivio, come a noi pareria al proposito quando ancora gli concorra il parer vostro, il solito et vecchio Archivietto è in la rocca nostra de Milano. Qual veduto, et considerato essere a ciò idoneo, lo fareti redrizzare et poner in ordine, et in esso reponere queste tutte scritture et successive le altre saranno de simil importanza et meritevole di bona custodia. Ne parerà anche a proposito, anzi espediente che de esse se ne facciano far li transumpti, et copie autentiche quale poi si abbino a conservare in Cancellaria et adoperar secondo li bisogni

Chancery Structure, October 1525–March 1531

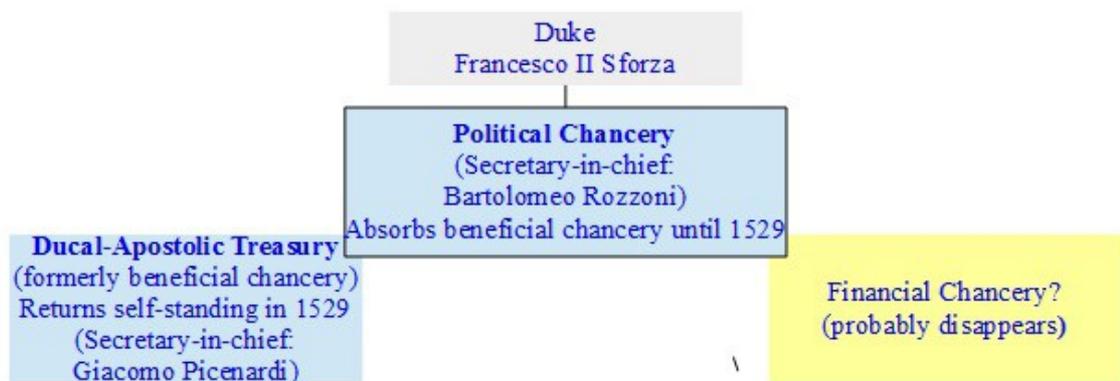


Fig. 1.3

These lines are extraordinary because they clearly reveal a tight connection between a long-awaited return to political and institutional order, and the ordering of the archive and the chancery (understood here as physical places.) It is worth noticing the materiality of the process devised in the letter: writings that are first and foremost perceived as frail (they are not to be ‘moved too often from place to place’) are going to be carefully preserved (*bona custodia*) in a safe place; the writings will also be transcribed for the everyday use of the chancery, so that they will become at the same time both historical and useful.

Furthermore, we know what were the writings that Francesco II was shipping to Milan, because the above-mentioned list survives.²⁰ Seventeen documents were listed in alphabetical order, from A to S, and can be easily divided in three groups. Firstly, the five documents from A to E pertain to the 1494 investiture of Ludovico Sforza as duke of Milan made by emperor Maximilian I. Secondly, the eight documents from F to O²¹ range from 1522 to 1530, and regard directly Francesco: among them a privilege of Charles V annulling any donation involving estates of the Duchy of Milan which—given its date, 1 January 1522—was evidently intended to invalidate the anti-Sforza redistributions of lands and goods that occurred during the second French domination; a first investiture as duke of Milan (30 October 1524); the new investiture as duke of Milan (2 January 1530); a number of documents pertaining to the Congress of Bologna of 1530; and a copy of the Treaty of Madrid (1526), by which France renounced claims in Italy. Finally, the four documents from P to S regard the selling of the *domus Cancellariae* (‘Palace of the Chancery’), located in Rome, one of the most valuable estates belonging to the Sforza.²²

The sense of this list is clear. Throughout all the difficulties of his history as troubled prince, Francesco II had accumulated a portable ‘treasure’ of documents that provided support for his most basic claims. It included the ducal title granted to his family in 1494; his old and new investitures as duke; two documents that disqualified any French interference on his dominion; and the extremes of the new European *status quo* as it emerged from the Congress of Bologna. Now, he was moving this treasure to the castle of Porta Giovia in order to constitute the core of a re-ordered archive. In turn, this archive should have been a point of reference for the chancery, now steadily located in the castle.

These premises seemed to announce the revival of the ambitious political project

20 BAMi, *L 44 inf. (5)*, ll. 41-42.

21 The order goes F, G, H, I, K, L, M, O.

22 On the management of, and the repeated attempts to sell, the *domus Cancellariae*, see Sacchi 2005, vol. 1, 113-123.

that had characterised the first return of Francesco II back in 1522. But in fact, when seen from the perspective of chancery organisation and of documentary production, the last five years of the Sforza restoration are marked by a surprising decrease. Indeed, the only register belonging to the *Registri delle Missive* in this last phase (register n. 225) suggests that the volume of correspondence between the Sforza leadership and the periphery of the dominion diminished drastically. Firstly, this register includes the correspondence between the centre and *all* the peripheral officials, towns, and communities of the Duchy, whereas it took two different and parallel series to manage internal affairs between 1522 and 1525 (see below, p. 130). And secondly, register n. 225 covers five years of correspondence, (1531–1535), whereas the register covering the widest timespan of the 1522–1525 period (n. 221) does not exceed two years and four months. One may argue that other *Registri delle Missive* could have existed and have gone lost, but I maintain that the unification of the two original series and the uniqueness of register n. 225 cannot be a coincidence. The register does not show significant gaps in its chronological or geographic coverage: the production and delivery of chancery documents was simply sporadic.

The analysis of the other chancery branches confirms this trend. Firstly, there is no evidence to suggest that a self-standing financial branch of the chancery was re-established. Indeed, the only extant register dealing exclusively with financial affairs contains the correspondence exchanged with Cremona for a reformation of the taxes to pay on rural estates, but it was under the control of the *Maestri delle Entrate Ordinarie* ('Masters of the Ordinary Income'), a largely independent magistracy that did not include members of the duke's inner circle.²³ Secondly, the beneficial branch, which continued to exist, was now a *mixed* institution, partially controlled by Francesco II and by the Holy See; the head-secretaries of the branch (Giacomo Picenardi and Melchione Langhi) belonged to the Roman curia—they were both Apostolic protonotaries.²⁴ Given the crucial political importance of benefices, the 'legalisation' of Papal interferences in their distribution must be considered a major setback for the Sforza.²⁵

Therefore, the chancery appears to have been both less active and less structured than ten years before (fig. 1.4, p. 61). The political project that underlay the organisation

23 ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 47.

24 Somaini 2012, 41; Ramacciotti Teani 1996.

25 On the importance of the distribution of ecclesiastical benefices for strengthening the bonds with Sforza loyalists and for coopting new supporters, see Leverotti 1994a, 312. On ecclesiastical benefices in the Duchy of Milan see Somaini 2012. On the strong disputes between Francesco II and the Roman curia regarding ecclesiastical benefices, see Oldrini 1989).

Chancery Structure, March 1531–November 1535

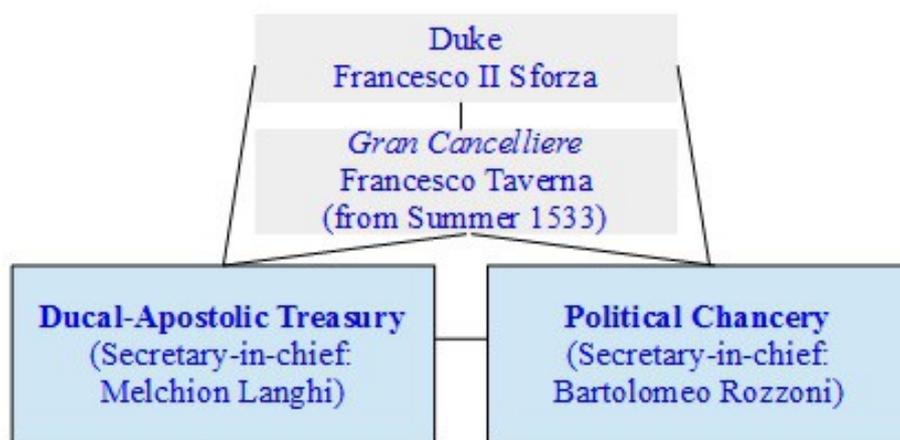


Fig. 1.4

of the chancery seems to have changed too. As anticipated, between 1522 and 1525, the chancery was intended to revive the function it served in the Sforza golden age, i.e. an apparatus through which the Sforza leadership supervised and directed all the single magistracies. Between 1531 and 1535, such an ambition was outdated. Francesco II definitively refused to restore his old ducal prerogatives; rather, he aimed at re-positioning himself into a new political landscape characterised by competition from different institutional bodies, each one with its own chancery. To this end, Francesco kept a small and agile political chancery, but did not re-establish the judicial branch and the financial branches, and gave up the sole control of the beneficial branch. These moves gave way to the rise of the Senate and of the *Maestri delle Entrate*—which dealt with judicial and financial affairs respectively.²⁶ It is no coincidence that both these institutions were destined to long life: as late as in the early eighteenth century, jurist Giuseppe Benaglio (1668–1735) still saw the Senate and the *Maestri delle Entrate* as the first and the second Milanese institution for importance.²⁷ The *Economato Ducale-apostolico*, too, survived throughout the early modern age.

It would certainly be easy to label this process as a straightforward decline; yet, a look forward to the first years of Milan under Charles V (1535–1559) demonstrates that things are more complex than this.²⁸ The secret chancery did not disappear with the death of the duke, but continued to exist and to maintain its name (*cancellaria secreta*). It operated under the direction of the *Gran Cancelliere*, who supervised the activity of the State magistracies and counseled the governor, the latter ruling on behalf of the emperor.²⁹ From the point of view of its structure, the secret chancery would lose the beneficial branch and eventually become a single entity, thus finishing a long but inexorable process of simplification. Therefore, following the evolution of the ducal chancery, especially in the years between 1531 and 1535, ultimately allows us to witness the emergence of the institutional balance that would inform the political dialectic of early modern Milan. This is so true that when Franco Arese compiled a monumental repertoire of offices and office-holders of the State of Milan in the early modern age, he included the last phase of Francesco II as duke as a *foundational* moment.³⁰

Generally speaking, this section on the chancery structure demonstrates the

26 For the history of the Senate, see Petronio 1972. For a short history of the *Maestri delle Entrate* see Arese 1970, 70.

27 Benaglio 1711, 1. The *Magistrato delle Entrate* was divided in two departments, *Entrate Ordinarie* ('Ordinary income') and *Entrate Straordinarie* ('Extraordinary income').

28 See for example Chabod 1971a, 143-185; Lanzini 2011.

29 Arese 1970, 66.

30 *Ibid.*: 60-156.

usefulness of tracing the documentary history of institutions. Indeed, studying the organisation of political-administrative writing during Francesco II's reign enables considerations that would otherwise be impossible to make. There is no other evidence providing such a thought-provoking perspective on the different political projects underlying the three distinct phases of the Sforza restoration.

2. The chancery size

Now that the evolution of the structure of the chancery has been delineated in all its steps, it is appropriate to determine the chancery's size. Scholars normally spend little (if any) effort on finding out *how many* people worked in a chancery at any given time. Yet this is a central element determining government's wordpower. In the case of the Sforza restoration, we need to know how 'heavy' was the wordpower of Francesco II as he set himself the ambitious goal of ruling the Duchy of Milan; furthermore, we also need to know whether the weight of Francesco's wordpower changed throughout the different phases of the Sforza restoration.

As we shall see in more detail at the end of Chapter 4, maintaining chancery personnel entailed both benefits and costs, and so did delivering ducal documents around and outside the Sforza territory. As a result, the volume and efficiency of wordpower were not just a given, but an economic and political *investment* worthy of attention. This investment had serious consequences for governance, because one of the main challenges of pre-modern statecraft was distance—i.e. the logistical obstacles undermining the authority's presence and action in far flung territories; a continuous and efficient deployment of chancery documents could counter distance's 'tyranny'.³¹

Two premises are necessary before offering the figures on chancery size. The first is that the figures will inevitably be approximate, since documents providing lists of chancery members are scattered (see Introduction, sub-section 4.2), and, it is not always clear whether they refer to the entire ducal chancery or only to some branches. Yet, cross-checking data coming from different sources will allow us to minimise the degree of approximation, and to detect reliable trends. The second necessary premise (which follows below) is a short history of the Sforza chancery size during the golden age. Indeed, determining the size of Francesco II's chancery logically makes sense only in a comparative perspective.

31 Nearly seventy years ago, Fernand Braudel already spoke of the 'tyranny of distance' as a decisive factor in statecraft: see Braudel 1995 (first edition 1949). The notion of 'tyranny of distance' later became the key-concept in Geoffrey Blainey's history of Australia: Blainey 1967.

2.1. *The chancery size from Francesco I to Ludovico*

The first *ruolo* available for the Sforza age dates from December 1450, and reveals that the secret chancery of Francesco I around the time of his accession as duke of Milan counted eighteen members: twelve between secretaries and clerks, plus six *registratores*—literally 'those who fill in the registers.'³² This figure seems to have remained steady for the first years of Francesco I's reign, because the signatures at the bottom of the first version of the chancery regulations (1 October 1454) show exactly the same situation.³³

According to Franca Leverotti, a first increase in the number of members occurred during the 1460s, and when Francesco I died (1466) the secret chancery counted around thirty people.³⁴ Leverotti does not provide a reference for this claim, but two *ruoli* I could find (dated 1472 and 1484) both list twenty-seven names, suggesting that the figure is reliable, and that the chancery continued to stay in that order of magnitude during the 1470s and 1480s.³⁵

A second increase of the chancery size significantly emerged in the late 1480s, after duke Ludovico foiled a conspiracy against his person and eliminated some of his most dangerous internal enemies—including a chancery secretary, Aloisio da Terzago—eventually becoming the unchallenged ruler of the Duchy of Milan.³⁶ A *ruolo* dated 1489 lists 37 names, eight of whom are explicitly referred to as 'lord Ludovico's chancery.'³⁷ But it was during the 1490s that the chancery seems to have 'exploded!' The *ruoli* from 1496,³⁸ 1497³⁹ and 1499⁴⁰ count 59, 44 and 50 names respectively, suggesting that the chancery size was going to double that of the previous three decades. The variations are evidently very noticeable, even in the short term: this may suggest either that the compilation of the *ruoli* was improvised—payments were often partial and irregular—or that the chancery size was elastic and related to immediate needs, so that a number of clerks worked only occasionally.

In any case, the trend for the golden age is clear. Between 1450 and 1455, the wordpower of warlord-turned-duke Francesco Sforza proved too 'light' to suit his new administrative and diplomatic needs. Therefore, between 1455 and 1466, Francesco I nearly doubled the size of the chancery, which reached around thirty members. His

32 Leverotti 1994a, 311.

33 BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, l. 89.

34 Leverotti 1994a, 318.

35 ASMi, *Atti di governo, Uffici e Tribunali Regi, Parte Antica*, 86.

36 Corio 1978, vol. 2, 1475-1476.

37 ASMi, *Atti di Governo, Uffici e Tribunale Regi, Parte Antica*, 86.

38 *Ivi.*

39 *Ivi.*

40 Santoro 1939, 78-79.

successor Galeazzo Maria did not increase this apparatus, because the political framework in which he was operating substantially matched that of his father. By contrast, the status of Ludovico was different. As regent, his degree of legitimacy in ruling the Duchy was weak, and he had to superimpose groups of his most faithful followers on a pre-existing administrative organisation that until 1494 still formally belonged to duke Gian Galeazzo Sforza. As a result, the overall size of the chancery increased up to nearly 60 members.

2.2. The chancery size under Francesco II

How big was the chancery of Francesco II during the first phase, between 1522 and 1525? Cross-checking data from the *ruoli*, the *Registri delle Missive* and the *Registri Ducali* demonstrates that twenty-three people were active in the chancery.⁴¹ This cannot be taken as the exact chancery size, since a turn-over must have occurred in four years. Nevertheless, this number can be usefully compared with the size of the entire chancery entourage of Massimiliano Sforza, who acted in a similar situation of political turmoil. The result is surprising: Caterina Santoro calculated that in the same number of years (four, between 1512 and 1515) Massimiliano had counted on at least thirty-nine chancery members, nearly twice as many as his younger brother's.⁴² This fact is quite ambivalent: was Massimiliano's chancery stronger and more efficient because of its bigger size, or was chancery personnel more precarious—and therefore more numerous on a four-year time-span—as a result of political instability? Reversing the point of view, the figures nevertheless suggest that the socio-political arena of the Sforza court was still appealing enough to attract men and competition at the time of Massimiliano; this was less true ten years later under Francesco II.

More importantly, evidence from the year 1525 offers the chance to grasp the actual size of the secret chancery at a defined time. Indeed, the two *ruoli* available for the first phase of the Sforza restoration date 14 September⁴³ and 20 October 1525.⁴⁴ They differ from each other: the September *ruolo* lists eight names, only one of which does not come up in the October *ruolo*;⁴⁵ in turn, the October *ruolo* lists eleven names, four of which are new and can not be found in the September *ruolo*.⁴⁶ Since the timelag

41 For the full list, see p. 85.

42 Santoro 1968, 385-387.

43 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 223, l. 74, 1525 September 14.

44 ASMi, *Atti di Governo, Uffici e Tribunali Regi, Parte Antica*, 86.

45 [the name appearing only in this list is in italics] Bartolomeo Rozzoni, Giovanni Stefano Robbio, Galeazzo Capra, Giovanni Giacomo Sironi, Agostino Parravicini, Ascanio Alfieri, Evangelista Imperiale, *Giacomo Alfieri*.

46 [the names appearing only in this list are in italics] *Giorgio Gadio*, Bartolomeo Rozzoni, *Giovanni Angelo Ricci*, Giovanni Stefano Robbio, Galeazzo Capra, *Camillo Ghilini*, Agostino Parravicini, Giovanni Giacomo Sironi, Ascanio Alfieri, Evangelista Imperiale, *Gerolamo Rozzoni*.

separating the *ruoli* is of only thirty-seven days, it is legitimate putting them together to obtain a base of twelve names. Then, browsing the *Registri delle Missive* n. 221 and n. 223—which both cover September and October 1525—we can collect three additional names of clerks, reaching a total of fifteen chancery members.⁴⁷ Because it is obtained on the basis of four different sources, this looks like a very reliable figure.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to establish the size of the chancery during the exiled years between 1526 and 1530, because we have neither *ruoli* nor *Registri delle Missive* at our disposal. The impression is that the group of the most faithful Sforza secretaries sufficed to attend to both internal affairs and diplomacy.

What is sure is that Francesco II did not take advantage of the relative political stability of the years 1531–1535 to increase the weight of his wordpower beyond the levels of the 1522–1525 period. Indeed, the five undated *ruoli* from the 1530s all list between fourteen and seventeen names.⁴⁸ This fact perfectly matches what has already emerged in the analysis of the chancery structure, which was not refined, but rather simplified during the last five years of the Sforza restoration. Francesco had abandoned his original idea of a Sforza-controlled chancery catalysing all aspects of the governance of the Duchy. As a consequence, the size of the chancery did not need an extension.

As anticipated, however, it is the comparison between Sforza restoration and golden age that is particularly significant (fig. 1.5, p. 67). As a matter of fact, with its circa fifteen members, the chancery of Francesco II always remained smaller than the one of his grandfather Francesco I seventy-five years before, as the latter had just begun settling in Milan. It is true that the extension of the Duchy after 1522 was one-fifth smaller than in 1499 (p. 27), but this alone cannot change the conclusion that Francesco II, especially with the ambitious political project that marked the years 1522–1525, attempted to control the entire Duchy of Milan with a remarkably limited wordpower. This factor certainly posed tight limitations on the overall effectiveness of late-Sforza governance.

As in the case of chancery structure, however, interpreting this as an example of straightforward decline would be misleading, especially as far as the 1530s are concerned. Indeed, the secret chancery would maintain the same size also under Charles V: this shows that the number of chancery members was actually functional to the chancery's role in the emerging institutional balance of the State of Milan. Had the secret

47 Geronimo Bertone (signature *Politianum*), Giovanni Paolo de Scarli (*Scaurum*) and the unidentified *Rocham*.

48 ASMi, *Atti di Governo, Finanze, Parte Antica*, 857.

Chancery Size, 1450–1535

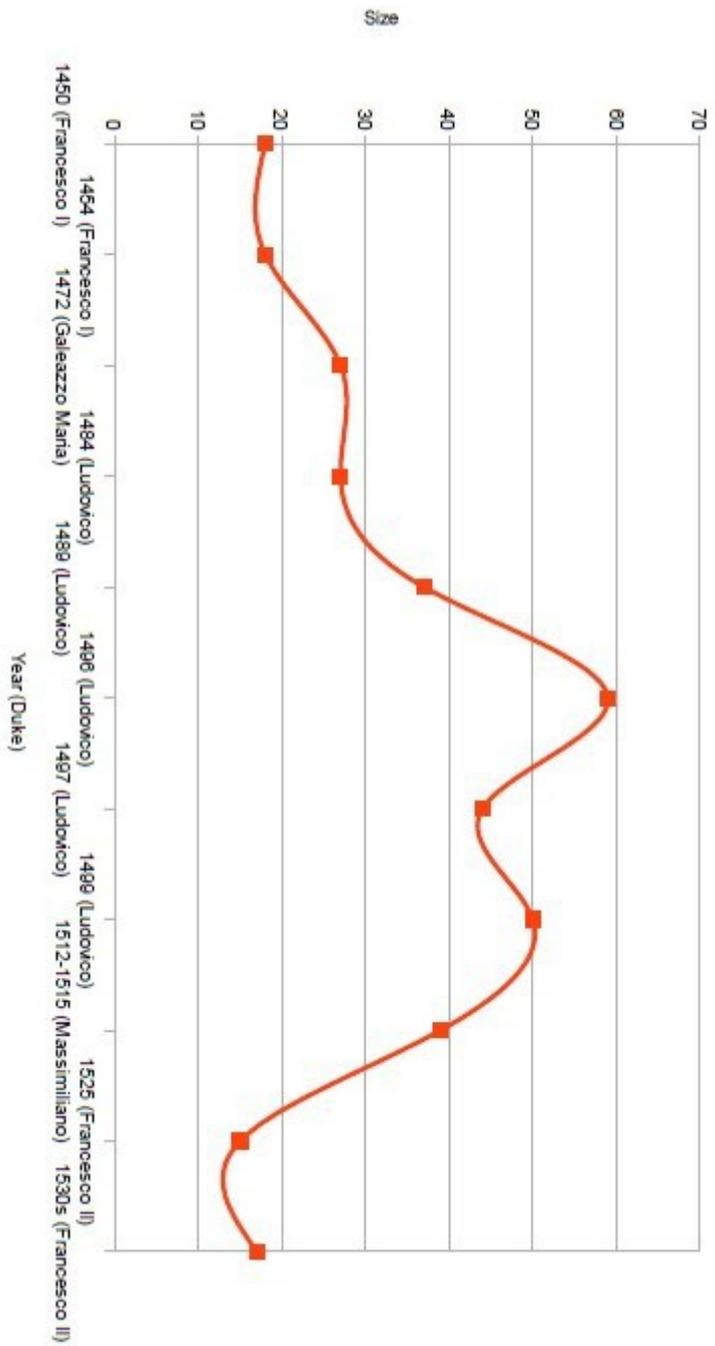


Fig. 1.5

chancery just been an 'holdover' from the age of the Sforza, dismantling it after Francesco II's death—immediately or gradually—would have been easy. Instead, a new series of registers opened under the Habsburg administration, the *Registri dei Mandati*—recording the expenses of (and for) the central State offices—testifies how the chancery remained in the region of fifteen members for many years to come.⁴⁹

3. The chancery hierarchy

Aggregate figures hide a variety of different roles in the chancery. In delineating the structure of the chancery, I have repeatedly mentioned the presence of the *Gran Cancelliere* and of a number of secretaries; in addition, I have also hinted at the existence of a proper chancery hierarchy with different ranks, at least during the years 1522-1525 and 1531-1535. In this section, I will look at this hierarchy in detail. On the one hand, I will explain the typical tasks each rank of the hierarchy had in the process of creation of a document. On the other hand, I will analyse whether chancery members, according to their rank, played *only* a technical documentary role, or also a more complex one. From top to bottom, the chancery hierarchy—as explicitly reported in the chancery *ruoli*—included the *Gran Cancelliere*, the body of the secretaries (with a first secretary and a chamber secretary), the chancery clerks, the coadjutors, and the ushers. One document I found also alludes to the existence of a chancery chaplain (see below, sub-section 3.5).

3.1. The Gran Cancelliere

As anticipated in the general introduction (p. 31), the figure of the *Gran Cancelliere* was first established in the *Constitutio* of 1522, and it would maintain its centrality in the institutional landscape of the State of Milan until the eighteenth century. During the reign of Francesco II, *Gran Cancellieri* were Girolamo Morone (from 18 May 1522 to his arrest on 15 October 1525) and Francesco Taverna, who was appointed in Summer 1533 and held the post until his death in 1560,⁵⁰ well beyond the end of the Sforza dynasty. The role of *Gran Cancelliere* remained vacant between October 1525 and Summer 1533.

The *Constitutio* is quite ambivalent in delineating the prerogatives of the *Gran Cancelliere*. On the one hand, the text is very specific, stating that he would directly inherit the functions that the *primo segretario* maintained during the Sforza golden age.⁵¹

49 ASMi, *Archivio Ducale Spagnolo-Austriaco, Archivio Registri delle Cancellerie dello Stato, Serie XXII – Mandati*, for example 1-5. The names of the secret chancery members are mentioned (roughly yearly) together with those of the officers of all the central magistracies based in Milan.

50 The exact date of the appointment is uncertain, because the related document has never been found. In ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 225, the signatures of Taverna start in July 1533. For Taverna's death see Arese 1970, 80.

51 Landus 1637, 145: 'Miores itaque nostri unum ante alios omnes a secretis virum deligere consueverunt

The reason for the change of title from '*primo secretario*' to '*Gran Cancelliere*' is not explained, but the (rather bold) ambition of equating the role of Morone to that of some celebrated Chancellors of the early 1500s is quite evident— among them, Mercurino da Gattinara for the emperor Charles V, Floremond Robertet for the king of France Francis I, Thomas Wolsey for the king of England Henry VIII, Bernardo Cles for the archduke of Austria Ferdinand I.⁵²

On the other hand, the *Constitutio* devotes only few lines to the determination of the *Gran Cancelliere*'s functions, and the result is inevitably vague. He was required to guarantee the conservation and the growth of the state, and '[he was required to] hold the helm just like the most trustworthy mariner, so that [the state] would not be recklessly crashed against storms and dangers.'⁵³ Morone appreciated this image, so much so that a ship was minted on the *verso* of a medal bearing his portrait, with the motto *ET EMERSIT* ('and it emerged'). This choice testified his deep bond with Francesco II, because the latter also had a medal minted with a ship and the motto *INVITIS VENTIS* ('unshaken by the storm') when he was yet to become duke of Milan.⁵⁴

The all-embracing role of the *Gran Cancelliere* was inherently political; furthermore, it logically foresaw the management of information and communication. To stick to Morone's iconography, it is worth noticing that painter Andrea Solario (1470–1524) portrayed him in the dynamic act of handing a letter with the word *cito* ('urgent') to someone off the picture (fig. 1.6, p. 71); furthermore, the scene suggests that Morone was busy beginning to write another message, his left hand reaching for a blank sheet lying on his desk. These details clearly highlight how the idea of decision making was strictly connected to that of document handling and the effective delivery of correspondence.⁵⁵

And indeed, on a documentary plain, the multi-levelled influence of the *Gran Cancelliere* was nearly ubiquitous, and materially emerged in three ways. Firstly, the signature of the *Gran Cancelliere* can be found (preceded by a *vidit/visa*, 'checked') at the bottom-left corner of register entries, signalling that he had given the go-ahead to the

quem primum Secretarium nuncupabant (...). Nos itaque mutato Magistratus nomine, Supremum status nostri Cancellarium appellare volumus (...).'

52 On Gattinara, see Headley 1983; on Robertet, see Mayer 1994; on Wolsey, see Gunn and Lindley 1991; on Bernardo Cles, see pp. 155-156.

53 Landus 1637, 145: '(...) rei arduas, ac difficillimas ad status conservationem amplificationemque pertinentes petractetm ac tamquam fidelissimus nauta clavum teneat, ne procellis insidiisve incaute mergatur.'

54 For Morone's medal, see Gaetani 1761, vol. 1, 160. For Francesco II's medal, see Sacchi 2005, vol. 1, 101. This medal pre-dates 1522, because Francesco II is qualified only as 'duke of Bari,' the only honorific title he had before becoming duke of Milan.

55 Brown 1987. For a quick discussion of Morone's portrait, originally attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, see page 233.

delivery of a document that others (the duke and/or the secretaries) had composed. Secondly, the signature of the *Gran Cancelliere* can be found at the bottom-right corner of original letters missive. In this case, the *Gran Cancelliere* acted as secretary, personally composing or dictating the message that a clerk would have materially written. Finally, when the script of the signature clearly matches the script of the main text, we can conclude that the *Gran Cancelliere* directly conducted the entire process of document-making (fig. 1.7, p. 72).

Of the two *Gran Cancellieri*, Girolamo Morone is certainly the one who used the highly discretionary power granted by the *Constitutio* in a more unscrupulous way, acting as the actual *alter ego* of Francesco II. The tight partnership between Morone and the duke was so notorious that writer and satirist Pietro Aretino (1492–1556) satirized it in one of his irreverent pamphlets.⁵⁶ Aretino argued that Francesco would have retired in a hermitage to redeem himself from his ‘hypocrite ribaldries,’ and there would have appeared ‘the shadow of Girolamo Morone, holding in his hand the book in which, when he was alive, he transcribed the fraudulent deeds of his excellency [the duke].’⁵⁷ The ‘book’ symbolising the material bond between the duke and the *Gran Cancelliere* clearly recalls a chancery register such as those I have just discussed.

To some extent, Morone's overtly political behaviour was certainly motivated by the unstable context in which he operated between 1522 and 1525. By contrast, Francesco Taverna had the chance to interpret his role in a much more ‘institutional’ way in the quieter years 1533–1535. He supervised the activity of the chancery thoroughly—even before his appointment as *Gran Cancelliere*, as we have seen in the Taverna charter that opens this thesis—but he can hardly be found acting as secretary, or writing documents with his own hand. His 27-year-long tenure (first under the Sforza, then under the imperial party, finally under the Spanish) is a testimony to his more careful conduct. Not coincidentally, he was the first and only Italian *Gran Cancelliere* of early modern Milan—the post being normally reserved to close ‘foreign’ representatives of the Spanish kings. And yet, the only accident of his career is also very interesting, because it was due to strictly documentary reasons. In 1555, Taverna was jailed with the accusation of having materially added the names of four outlaws on a safe-conduct intended for other people. He was later acquitted, but the episode underscores the power deriving from mere

⁵⁶ Luzio 1900.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 20. Among other things, Aretino was probably referring to the political homicides Francesco II had been accused of (see also Introduction, n. 53).

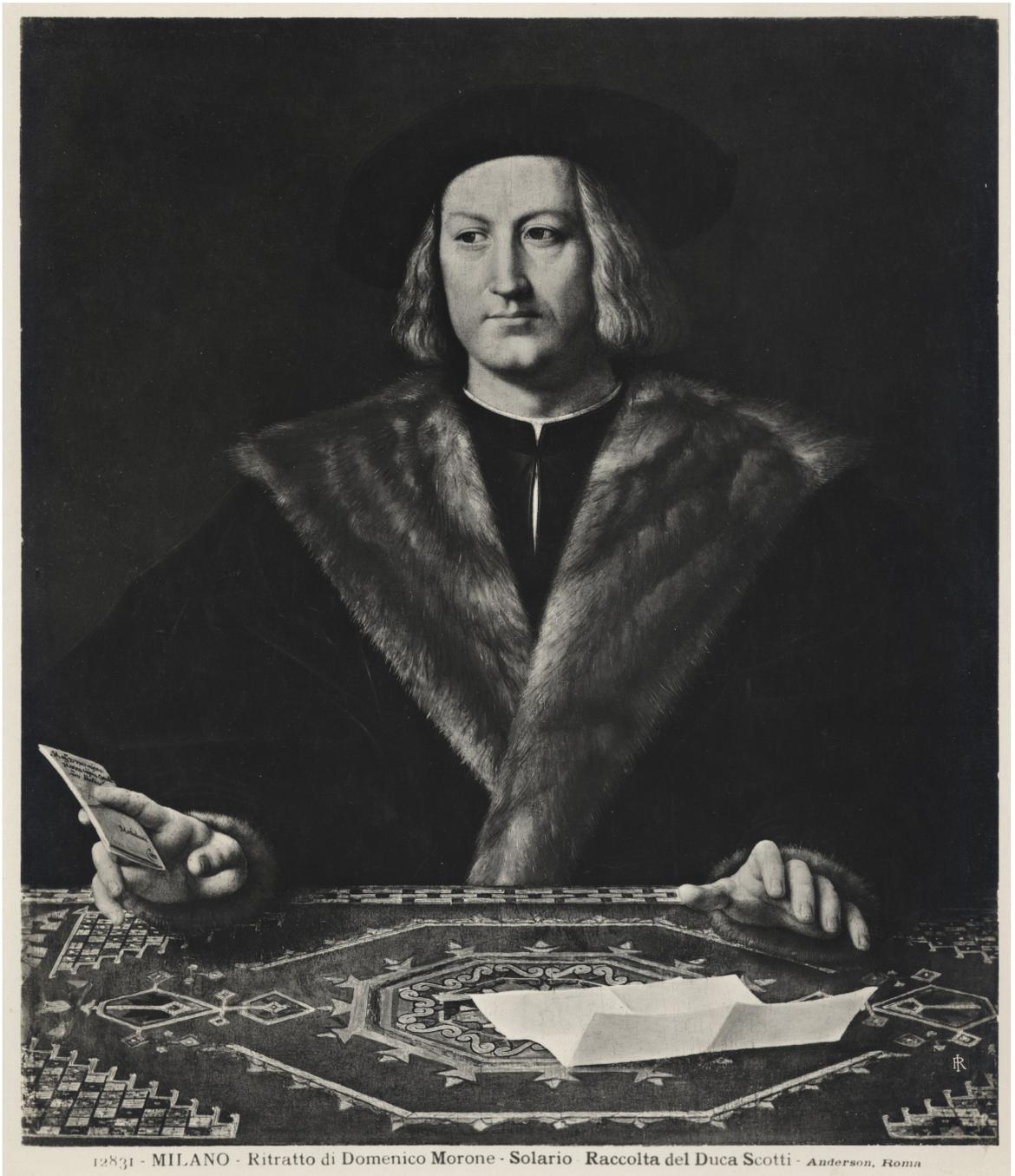


Fig. 1.6: Andrea Solario, Portrait of Girolamo Morone (© Fondazione Federico Zeri, University of Bologna)

1522 24
R^{mo} et Ill^{mo} Princeps dñe tanq̄ pater honor. Secundo il
Sano ricordo di v. s. R^{ma} mandiamo lo Egregio nro secret^o
Amico Taegio ostensore dela pnte nuncio in nome nro apresso
al Ser^{mo} Infante, et per fare residentia in Corte de sua Ser.
Al quale habbiamo comisso faccia capo ad v. s. R^{ma} et in
ogni cosa circa le negotiatione gli occadere ad fare per il
commune beneficio si del Stato dela Ces^a M^{ta} et di sua ser.^{ta} 3^{to}
del nro segua il parere di quella: tenendosi sicura che et
per la prudentia sua, et l'amore n ha sempre portato, et
porta no mi manchava di adiuto, et paterno consiglio,
et indirizava sempre le cose nre al migliore porto sora poss.
Secundo il Salto suo. Così preghiamo v. s. R^{ma} che et in
glo gli esponera in nome nro epso Secretario al pnte, et
accadere forgli intendere nel aduenire gli reda, et
presti fede quanto ad nui stessi. Rendendosi certa v. s.
R^{ma} che quello fara per nui et stato nro, lo collocara in
persona dela quale, et dele cose sue potra sempre disporre,
come già longo tempo po di nui essere certificata. et in sua
bona gratia se ricomendiamo. Mediolani xx decobr 1522
di Vassago R^{ma}
Ben^{to} for
de Milano
H. Moronus

Fig. 1.7: ASMi, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Milan, 20 December 1522. Girolamo Morone wrote and signed this letter, which also bears the autograph signature of Francesco II

physical proximity to records.⁵⁸

3.2. *The secretaries*

Below the *Gran Cancelliere*, the highest rank in the chancery hierarchy was that of secretary. As seen above, each chancery branch (political, beneficial, financial) was directed by a different secretary. But the political chancery had more secretaries, with an internal hierarchy. The head of the branch, Bartolomeo Rozzoni, was qualified as *primo segretario*, this old Sforza chancery title marking superiority on his colleagues.⁵⁹ Giovanni Angelo Ricci is often referred to as *segretario di camera*⁶⁰ (literally 'chamber secretary'), which means that he worked as personal scribe of the duke. The others were 'simple' secretaries, and if they had specific assignments, these have not emerged from the documentation.

Technically, the task of the ducal secretaries was translating the will of the duke into the most appropriate documentary and rhetorical form. Secretaries composed the text of the document: they organised it making use of the right formulas, choosing the titles to address the recipient, and so forth. Secretaries could write the fair copy of what they had composed, but they often delegated this duty to the lower-ranking chancery members, i.e. the clerks and the coadjutors. The signature of the secretary who was—either directly or indirectly—responsible for the writing of a document is to be found at the bottom-right corner of both original documents and register entries (fig. 1.8, p. 74).

However, as we have just seen with the trial involving Francesco Taverna, the material handling of documents easily turned into a strong agency on decision making. Historiography has long been aware of the political influence of secretaries.⁶¹ In this sense, the history of the Sforza chancery during the golden age was emblematic too: Niccolò Machiavelli—the secretary-politician par excellence—considered Cicco Simonetta one of the few secretaries to deserve the title of 'most excellent mind' (*eccellentissimo cervello*) mainly because of his strictly political skills.⁶²

Francesco II's chancery did not host characters as famous as Simonetta or Machiavelli, but the body of the secretaries certainly functioned as a powerful inner circle

58 For Taverna's trial and, more generally, for details on his career, see Calvi 1882.

59 This title is reported in the chancery *ruoli* preserved in ASMi, *Atti di Governo, Finanze, parte antica*, 857.

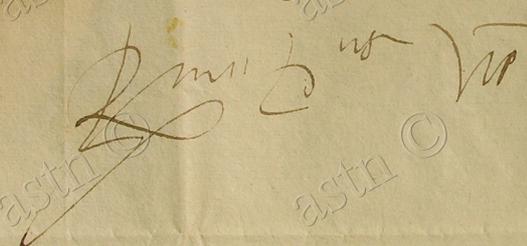
60 For example: ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 225, l. 40, 1532 May 12; ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 194, c. 20, 1535 May 6.

61 Renaissance Florence represents a particularly well-known case study, with monographs devoted to secretaries/clerks and their distinctively political activity: see Brown 1977, Black 2002, Guidi 2009, Klein 2013.

62 Simonetta 2004, 127.

29 apr. 1525

et Jff Dne vni pr bon! Mandando noi dal sex^{mo}
 Principe lo Egregio L. scipione atellano nro zullo
 Dilect^{mo} per exponere alcune cose a quella sex^{ta}
 a nome nro non di poco momento, li hauemo ancho
 comisso visiti n. S. R. qual piu volentera noi visita
 vessimo pntialmente, si potessimo, et anch li dica
 alcune cose a nome nro: Pregandola adunch sia
 contenta accettare dicta visitatione con quello bono
 animo che la facemo fare, et ch la figuale ma obseruan^{za}
 verso lei ricerca, et anch creda ad epso L. scipione,
 come farebe a noi stessi, et ad n. S. R. ser ricoman^{za}.
 Mediolani xxij^o Aprilis. M. D. xxv




 Ritius

Fig. 1.8: ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Milan, 1525 April 29. The signature of secretary Giovanni Angelo Ricci (*Ritius*) is to be found under the autograph signature of the duke

to the duke. The clearest sign of the political significance of the secretaries was their systematic employment in diplomatic missions. Of the six secretaries active in the political branch of the secret chancery during the first and second phase of the Sforza restoration (1522–1531), five were entrusted with ambassadorial duties around Italy and Europe. Galeazzo Capra was sent to Venice; Amico Taegio and Camillo Ghilini were active in Germany, and Ghilini also reached Charles V in Spain; Giovanni Angelo Ricci repeatedly travelled to the Swiss Grisons that bordered with the Duchy of Milan; Giovanni Stefano Robbio (and the future *Gran Cancelliere* Francesco Taverna) were employed in France.⁶³

In addition, a document in the *Rogiti Camerali*—which preserves the files of the notaries who worked for the Duchy's central authorities—demonstrates how the bond between the duke and his secretaries could be very different from a simple master-servant relationship. On 3 September 1532, Francesco II agreed to transfer 920 imperial *lire*, 9 *soldi* and 6 *dinari*—quite a substantial sum—of tax revenues directly to *primo segretario* Bartolomeo Rozzoni, in order to extinguish a debt he had contracted in 1525 to satisfy some ‘most urgent needs’ of his.⁶⁴ From the document, we understand that Rozzoni had obtained two written receipts (*confessioni*) from the duke, so that the loan would be fully refundable in the future. It is clear that aiding Francesco with financial capital made Rozzoni an actual shareholder of ducal power, and not just a skilled rhetorician.

3.3. *The chancery clerks and the coadjutors*

Chancery clerks (*cancellari*) and coadjutors (*coadiutori*) represented the basic providers of wordpower at its most elementary level. Their documentary role was mainly technical: they physically wielded the pen and set in polished writing what others had composed. In other words, clerks and coadjutors did not normally have any direct political impact on chancery activities.

In the chancery of Francesco II, a division between secretaries-as-influencers on one side and clerks/coadjutors-as-executors on the other seems to have been actually in force. On a documentary level, this is well testified by the fact that clerks and coadjutors

63 Capra in Venice: ASMi, *Carteggio Estero, Venezia*, 1310-1313; Taegio and Ghilini in Germany: ASMi, *Carteggio Estero, Alemagna*, 590-591, 933, 1186-1192, 1327-1329; Ghilini in Spain: ASMi, *Carteggio Estero, Spagna*, 1336-1338; Ricci in Switzerland: ASMi, *Carteggio Estero, Svizzera*, 631-639; Robbio and Taverna in France: ASMi, *Carteggio Estero, France*, 560-562.

64 The document I refer to is to be found in ASMi, *Rogiti camerali*, 535, not. Giuliano Pessina, 1532 September 3. As for the magnitude of the money amount: according to Italian economic historian Carlo Maria Cipolla, at the end of the fifteen century, the daily salary of a specialised mason (*maestro da muro*) in Milan was 0,5/0,6 *lire*: Cipolla 1975, 64. In the same period, as Maria Paola Zanoboni notes, elite artisans like goldsmiths and glass-makers earned between 24 and 27/28 *lire* monthly: see Zanoboni 2010 and 2010a; Ead. 2004.

were not allowed to substitute secretaries in composing messages; or, if they did, they did so only anonymously, because their signatures never appear at the bottom-right corner of original documents. On a political level, it is worth noticing that clerks and coadjutors, unlike secretaries, were never employed in diplomatic missions.⁶⁵ For these reasons, even though they are nearly ubiquitous in the documentation, clerks and coadjutors are—paradoxically enough—the most elusive figures of the chancery hierarchy. We know of their existence through the chancery *ruoli*, and because of the practice of noting their names at the bottom of each act transcribed in the *Registri delle Missive*—but only between 1523 and 1525, and only intermittently.

And yet, browsing the *Registri delle Missive* and the *Registri Ducali*, one soon realises that clerks and coadjutors were no mere scribes. Their belonging to the chancery did not just entail the writing of documents, but a surprisingly wide range of affairs. I will offer just four examples I was able to find, but many more could emerge with more research. On 8 October 1522, clerk Agostino Parravicini was owed an amount of money because of some wine he supplied the court with.⁶⁶ In the same year, on 20 November, coadjutor Ascanio Alfieri was granted tax immunity together with his son Alessandro.⁶⁷ On 3 June 1523, clerk Giovanni Paolo de Scarli (and his brother Giovanni Bartolomeo) petitioned and obtained the management of the estates confiscated from a group of anti-Sforza rebels (the re-distribution of the rebels' estates involved also secretaries.)⁶⁸ Finally, a register entry dated 8 April 1525 informs us that Giorgio Corio—a clerk of the financial chancery (p. 85)—would receive money coming from tax collection for the entire year 1526 in order to recover a debt from the ducal *Camera* (regarding ‘things given for the court's use.’)⁶⁹ This last document is particularly important, because it shows that not only secretaries, but also chancery clerks could be actual shareholders of power. This argument is very important for my thesis, and deserves further elaboration. For this reason, I will soon come back to it in a separate sub-section (3.6).

Meanwhile, one last point to make about clerks and coadjutor is that the difference between them is unclear. From their titles, we can imagine that coadjutors assisted clerks;

65 The situation was different during the fifteenth century. Franca Leverotti, in reconstructing the biographies of the first diplomatic agents of Francesco I Sforza (the *famigli cavalcanti*) between 1450-1466, has highlighted how the duke often chose his diplomats among chancery clerks. See Leverotti 1992, 105-256 for their biographies.

66 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, l. 24, 1522 October 8

67 ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 68, ll. 175-178, 1522 November 20.

68 The register entry concerning clerk Giovanni Paolo de Scarli is ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 131, 1523 June 3. As for secretaries: ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 210, l. 37, 1524 May 25 (beneficiary Bartolomeo Rozzoni); ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 210, l. 61, 1525 April 4 (beneficiary Giorgio Gadio).

69 ‘[R]obe date per uso de la corte’: ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 26, l. 115.

but in fact, I could not find any evidence of how this assistance functioned in practice. The criterion was probably not that of work volume: clerk Galeazzo Capra is the most recurrent writer in *Registri delle Missive* n. 221 (May 1523–October 1525), whereas coadjutor Giovanni Giacomo Sironi is the most recurrent writer in *Registri delle Missive* n. 222 (April 1524–July 1525). We can hypothesise that coadjutors had the task of filling in the registers; but this is just an educated guess, deriving from the fact that in the chancery *ruoli* the rank of coadjutor seems to have gradually substituted that of *registrator* between the 1460s and 1480s. One criteria for distinguishing clerks and coadjutor was surely that of seniority, because chancery members started their *cursus honorum* from below, advancing promotion after promotion.

3.4. The ushers

The ushers (*uschieri* or *hostiari* in the sources, the second term meaning 'porters') were the lowest ranking members of the chancery hierarchy. A set of chancery *Ordines* compiled in 1456 explains their role in detail.⁷⁰ Ushers were attendants: they did not partake in the process of creation of a document, besides physically applying the ducal seal to letters patent. Furthermore, they acted as warders filtering access to the chancery; they assisted the scribes of every rank, making sure that the desks were equipped with the necessary writing materials at all times; and they kept the chancery in order, providing that the registers were always ready for consultation.

Scholars have never devoted attention to ushers, probably because their role has always seemed purely ancillary. However, some evidence from the *Registri delle Missive* produced under Francesco II throws additional light on the tasks and the status of the ushers, suggesting that their presence was less banal than previously expected. Indeed, during the Sforza restoration, ushers were not just employed as attendants within the chancery walls, but also as emissaries outside it, on the ground. For example, in December 1522, usher Agostino Gorgonzola was selected twice to bring orders of sure importance to recipients around Milan. In the first case, the usher brought to Filippo Archinto the order of appearing before *Gran Cancelliere* Girolamo Morone, under threat of a 1,000 ducats fine and the confiscation of all his possessions.⁷¹ In the second case, Gorgonzola brought to one Antonio Ascareto (probably a Genoese) a document sanctioning the latter's immediate ban from the Duchy, under threat of death.⁷² The result

⁷⁰ BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, l. 92. For a fuller treatment of the *Ordines*, see [Chapter 3, pp. 98-102](#).

⁷¹ ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, l. 76, 1522 December 11. Filippo Archinto (1500–1558), then in his prime, would become a famous jurist, theologian, and diplomat. See Alberigo 1961.

⁷² ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, l. 91, 1522 December 29.

of Gorgonzola's mission was annotated by an unidentified chancery member at the bottom of the order itself. The ushers' social milieu is also a very interesting element to analyse, but I discuss it at the end of the next chapter (pp. 120-121), where I focus on all the extra-administrative aspects of the chancery.

3.5. *The chancery chaplain*

Finally, an isolated document dated 23 July 1522 reveals the existence of one Augustinian friar, called Girolamo Morone (evidently a case of homonymy, and possibly a relation, with the *Gran Cancelliere*) who acted as 'chaplain of the secret chancery' (*capellanus cancellariae nostrae secretae*). Unfortunately, I did not come across other mentions of a chancery chaplain during my research. In the document, friar Girolamo is granted the income deriving from a chapel located in the Milanese church of San Gottardo.⁷³ The choice of this location is very interesting, and by no means accidental. Indeed, the church's full name was (and still is) San Gottardo *in Corte*, because the church was strictly linked with the *Corte dell'Arengo*—the former seat of the Visconti court, and of that of the Sforza until the mid-1470s. All the chancery members, for example, took an oath of observance of the chancery regulations right in San Gottardo's sacristy.⁷⁴ Hence, there seems to have been a long-standing relationship between the chancery and the church. This fact, too, has a social significance, and I will come back to this point in Chapter 3.

3.6. *Chancery members as shareholders of power*

Besides the formal ways in which chancery members manifested their presence in the documents according to their rank, the fundamental thing that has emerged from this overview of the chancery hierarchy is the impossibility of confining each rank into a strictly technical service. Frequenting the chancery was not a clerical 'job,' but constituted an important socio-political asset which, in turn, could be achieved only holding adequate socio-political and financial capital. Membership of the chancery set up a privileged channel between the Sforza and the whole court on one side, and the chancery member's family (or clan) on the other. This was not only true for the *Gran Cancelliere* and the body of the secretaries, but also for 'simple' clerks and coadjutors (and, to some extent, even for the ushers, as we shall see later in the dissertation—see pp. 120-121) For this

⁷³ ASMi, *Sforzesco, Potenze Sovrane*, 1471, 1522 July 23.

⁷⁴ ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 214, l. 115. Senatore 1998, 92. Senatore wrongly argues that San Gottardo was a chapel located in the castle of Porta Giovia, but the chancery would move to the castle only under duke Galeazzo Maria. On the political value of oath taking in historical perspective see Prodi 2002.

reason, it is fair to consider chancery members as true shareholders of power rather than as mere officers.

Scholarship sometimes acknowledges this fact: Nadia Covini, for example, in her biography of the noble Sforza chancery clerk Giovan Tommaso Piatti (c.1430–1502), points out that Piatti's employment in the chancery did not constitute an 'everyday, salaried, properly bureaucratic activity.'⁷⁵ However, considerations like these typically remain marginal, even though—if taken seriously—they are bound to re-calibrate our interpretation of what being a chancery member meant, and how the chancery worked as a whole.

Another thing I wish to highlight here is how drastically the perspective on the chancery changes, when we shift from the analysis of abstract power structures to the analysis of concrete power dynamics. When adopting a structure-based approach, chancery members resemble pawns moved from above, by a reified authority. By contrast, when we look at how the chancery practically worked, a whole range of political, social and material factors like those that have emerged above acquire great relevance for the understanding of our object of study. This principle will be very important for the rest of the thesis.

3.7. A comparison with the golden age

It is appropriate to conclude this section by quickly contextualising the hierarchy of Francesco II's chancery in a *longue durée* perspective. The division of the chancery in *Gran Cancelliere* (or *primo segretario*,) secretaries, clerks, coadjutors, and ushers stabilised during the 1490s, and would resist substantially unchanged until the eighteenth century.⁷⁶ When Francesco Sforza became duke of Milan in 1450, his chancery did not have coadjutors, but *registratores*.⁷⁷ However, as anticipated (p. 77), this role would gradually disappear between the 1450s and the 1480s. Moreover, one of the clerks was qualified as the 'seal-keeper' (*quello che tene il sigillo*), but I was unable to find such specialisation under Francesco II.⁷⁸

Few refinements of the chancery hierarchy occurred during the time of Ludovico, when a treasurer—who managed the money coming from chancery fees—and two archivists (*custodes archivorum*) appeared in the *ruoli*.⁷⁹ In Francesco II's chancery, the

75 Covini 2002, especially pp. 117-118.

76 See Lanzini 2011.

77 Leverotti 1994a, 311.

78 BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, f. 103

79 Caterina Santoro edited the *ruolo* of the year 1499 in Santoro 1939, 76.

figure of the treasurer explicitly emerged only during the 1530s, in the person of clerk Agostino Monti, who is qualified as such in three undated *ruoli* that pre-date 1535–37, as they list secretaries Camillo Ghilini (d. 1535) and Galeazzo Capra (d. 1537). Monti would later become secretary, and he would also obtain the title of archivist of the chancery during the 1540s.⁸⁰ I could not find any evidence of a proper archivist during the Sforza restoration. The role may have been implicitly assigned to one or more chancery members, since an archive—as we have seen—was re-established (and possibly re-ordered) in the early 1530s.

What changed radically overtime was the balance between the number of secretaries and the number of clerks and coadjutors. Between the 1460s and 1499, the chancery had always had a clearly pyramidal hierarchy: one *primo segretario* coordinated few secretaries, who in turn supervised the work of tens of scribes, the latter constituting the great majority of the entire personnel. When the chancery size shrank from the forty-five members of the 1490s to around fifteen in the 1520-30s, the decrease was not equal in each rank. Indeed, under Francesco II, the number of secretaries remained high (six-eight, plus the *Gran Cancelliere*), and matched or outnumbered the number of clerks and coadjutors (seven-nine).⁸¹ What was the reason of this discrepancy? The diminished wordpower certainly caused the cut of the lower ranks of the chancery: maintaining many clerks and coadjutors was pointless if they could not be put to work. By contrast, the stability of the body of secretaries is very interesting, because it demonstrates that their activity was considered crucial, and therefore unshrinkable. As we shall see in Chapter 3, this same process had also an impact on the social profile of the chancery.

To conclude this first chapter, let us recap the main points about the evolution of the chancery structure and size during the three phases of Francesco II as duke, and in comparison with the Sforza golden age.

Francesco II re-established the chancery few weeks after his return to Milan in 1522. The chancery had three branches: a political branch, a beneficial branch, and a financial branch. This first version of the chancery structure clearly recalled that of the Sforza golden age: a political, beneficial and financial chancery branch had existed since the times of Francesco I Sforza, in the 1450s. What Francesco II did not re-establish,

⁸⁰ Muoni 1874, 29-30.

⁸¹ In the five *ruoli* of the 1530s, the balance is 8 (*Gran Cancelliere* and secretaries)/9 (clerks and coadjutors), 9/6, 7/7, 9/9, 10/7.

however, was a self-standing judicial chancery branch. I hypothesise that this happened because the newly-founded Senate of Milan obtained the control of judicial affairs, and/or because cash-strapped Francesco II wished to control directly the highly profitable flow of petitions usually managed by the judicial chancery. Indeed, the political branch seems to have absorbed the management of judicial affairs.

This organisation of political-administrative writing collapsed when Francesco II was exiled by Charles V in South-eastern Lombardy, even though a pool of secretaries continued to manage diplomatic relations and to administer the reduced territory under Sforza control. In 1529, the beneficial chancery was re-established, but only in cooperation with the Holy See.

Significantly, after having been re-invested as duke (January 1530), Francesco II celebrated his return to Milan (March 1531) with a *documentary* effort: he planned to re-organise the Sforza archive, located in the castle of Porta Giovia. However, when seen from the point of view of chancery organisation, Francesco's last phase (March 1531–November 1535) is clearly marked by political disengagement. He kept the political and beneficial branch of the chancery, but did not re-establish the financial branch; the overall production of ducal letters seems to have considerably decreased.

As it is clear from this summary, following the evolution of the chancery structure is an excellent way to understand the ambitions and limits of the Sforza restoration. More specifically, the differences between the Sforza political project of the years 1522–1525 and that of the years 1531–1535 are evident, and they tell much of the timing and modes of Milan's transition from the Sforza age to the Spanish domination. During his first phase as duke, Francesco II was still convinced that the Duchy of Milan should have gravitated around the Sforza influence, but when he came back to Milan after the exile things had irremediably changed. Francesco probably realised that he did not have the resources to act as an absolute prince, and re-positioned himself in a less ambitious (but perhaps more solid) way. The chancery reflected this change in attitude, with the loss of the financial branch and a decrease in correspondence with the peripheries of the Duchy.

Can this process be defined as a straightforward decline, like the scholarly lack of interest for Francesco II implies? I do not think so. As explained above (pp. 36-37), it seems to me that the Sforza restoration was a very interesting age of turmoil, during which Francesco showed a remarkable will to formulate political projects in spite of an extremely difficult political and financial situation. Even his late re-positioning cannot be dismissed as outright powerlessness. As a matter of fact, the essential traits of Francesco's

chancery would remain unchanged in the decades following his death, demonstrating that his interpretation of the emerging institutional landscape was sensible.

Among these traits, I have devoted a separate section to chancery size. The chancery of Francesco II, with its circa fifteen members, was smaller than that of all his predecessors—it was roughly half of the chancery of Francesco I and Galeazzo Maria Sforza and less than one-third of the chancery of Ludovico Sforza. It is important to bear this in mind, especially if we consider the ambitiousness of the chancery structure of the years 1522–1525: Francesco II wished to rule like a Sforza duke of the golden age, but his 'raw' wordpower was very limited. However, the size of the chancery is also one key to realise that Francesco's late re-positioning was absolutely reasoned. Indeed, the chancery would maintain the same size also under Charles V, thus showing its functionality in the institutional balance of the Duchy.

Carrying out a documentary history of the Sforza restoration was necessary for two reasons. Firstly, because I had the chance to introduce several case-study-related concepts I will be repeatedly referring to throughout the thesis. And secondly, because documentary histories demonstrate that chanceries and political-administrative writing played a crucial role in the institutional balance of Renaissance states. Most importantly, though, this first chapter introduces a key-element for re-framing Renaissance written political culture (which is the overall purpose of this thesis:) chancery members, whatever their rank, were not just mere officers or scribes, but true shareholders of power. Indeed, a close analysis of how the chancery hierarchy concretely worked has shown that secretaries, clerks and coadjutors did not have a simply clerical relation with power, but rather a surprisingly complex one. They show substantial political and economic ties with the duke. This fact is a first sign of the inadequacy of bureaucratic models for the interpretation of Renaissance chanceries; it shows that a structure-based approach to chanceries, useful as it certainly is, ultimately overlooks some fundamental dynamics of power.

If the choice of chancery members was not primarily dictated by their technical expertise in document-making, but by the political and financial capital they brought to court, then the chancery worked as a network (through informal, horizontal webs of relationships) more than as an office (through a formal, vertical chain-of-command.) As a consequence, it becomes important to replace ranks with names, and to analyse chancery members in a social-historical perspective. What does the composition of the chancery network say about the Sforza restoration, and—more generally— about the management

of wordpower?

Chapter 2 - The Chancery Networks

The analysis of the chancery network during the Sforza restoration leads to identifying two very different phases that—not coincidentally—parallel the evolution of the chancery structure. The first phase covers the years between 1522 and 1525; the second phase arches from 1531 to 1535.

1. 1522–1525: the 'old boys network'

The twenty-three people who worked in the chancery between 1522 and 1525 can be seen in Chart 2.1 (p. 85). The four names in italics are those I was not able to identify. *Alexandrum* and *Vailatum* appear in *Registri delle Missive* n. 220 and n. 221 between February and December 1523, and then disappear.⁸² *Rocham* appears only rarely in *Registri delle Missive* n. 221 (ten entries), n. 222 (three entries), and n. 223 (eight entries). The case of *Rodobium/Robium* is more complicated. These two names coexist in the registers, possibly suggesting that they indicated two different persons. The chancery had a secretary named Giovanni Stefano Robbio: however, the sources refer to him both as 'Giovanni Stefano *de Rodobio*'⁸³ and 'Iohannes Stephanus *Robius*.'⁸⁴ Therefore, one between *Rodobium* and *Robium* could be the secretary and the other one an unidentified character; vice versa, if *Rodobium* and *Robium* were the same person, then Giovanni Stefano Robbio would be the most employed writer in the chancery.

The presence of the great majority of the remaining chancery members—at least fourteen out of nineteen—is directly motivated by a long-standing network gravitating around the Sforza. The documents themselves acknowledge this fact explicitly, for example in the case of financial secretary Ferrufini, who was appointed because of 'the unique faith, and the attitude that he and his forefathers had towards the once most Illustrious lord duke Ludovico.'⁸⁵ Four secretaries (Bartolomeo Rozzoni, Giovanni Giacomo Ferrufini, Giorgio Gadio, Giovanni Stefano Robbio) and two clerks (Bernardino de Lomeno and Agostino Parravicini) were already active under duke Ludovico in the 1490s,⁸⁶ and then again under Massimiliano between 1512 and 1515.⁸⁷ Hence, there existed a core of loyalists who tied their political fate to that of the Sforza; these loyalists

82 *Alexandrum*: ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, c. 160-275; *Registri delle Missive*, 221, c. 6-56, 1523 February 6–December 12; *Vailatum*: ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, c. 180-259 1523 February 21–April 24.

83 ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 68, l. 195, 1522 December 10.

84 So it appears in the *ruolo* dated 20 October 1525.

85 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 210, l. 3.

86 Santoro 1939, 78-79.

87 Santoro 1968, 385-387.

Chart 1

(members are listed in order of rank, and in alphabetical order within each rank)

	Name	Rank	Active before the Sforza restoration
1	Rozzoni, Bartolomeo	First secretary	X
2	Ricci, Giovanni Angelo	Chamber secretary	
3	Ferrufini, Giovanni Giacomo	Secretary (head of the financial chancery)	X
4	Gadio, Giorgio	Secretary (head of the beneficial chancery)	X
5	Ghilini, Camillo	Secretary	
6	Robbio, Giovanni Stefano	Secretary	X
7	Taegio, Amico	Secretary	
8	Bertone, Girolamo	Clerk	
9	Capra, Galeazzo	Clerk	
10	Corio, Giorgio	Clerk (financial chancery)	
11	Lomeno, Bernardino de	Clerk	X
12	Parravicini, Agostino	Clerk	X
13	Scarli, Giovanni Paolo de	Clerk	
14	Verano, Paolo	Clerk	
15	<i>Alexandrum</i>	Clerk or coadjutor	
16	Alfieri, Giacomo	Clerk or coadjutor	
17	<i>Rocham</i>	Clerk or coadjutor	
18	<i>Rodobium / Robium</i>	Clerk or coadjutor	
19	<i>Vailatum</i>	Clerk or coadjutor	
20	Alfieri, Ascanio	Coadjutor	
21	Imperiale, Evangelista	Coadjutor	
22	Rozzoni, Girolamo	Coadjutor	
23	Sironi, Giovanni Giacomo	Coadjutor	

left their posts when the Sforza lost control of the Duchy to the French, but they were readily reinstated in their place at every regime change, even after ten or twenty years. For example, the French banned secretary Gadio from the territory of the Duchy between 1516 and 1522, and Francesco II issued a document to rehabilitate him as soon as he recaptured his dominion.⁸⁸

Moreover, eight members apparently were at their first chancery experience, but they clearly owed their appointment to the connection between their families and the Sforza. Secretary Camillo Ghilini was the son of Giovanni Giacomo Ghilini,⁸⁹ who was regarded as the most powerful secretary under duke Ludovico.⁹⁰ The ties between the Ghilini family and the chancery of the dukes of Milan dated back to the times of Filippo Maria Visconti.⁹¹ Secretary Giovanni Angelo Ricci was the nephew of Zannino Ricci, ducal counsellor in the early fifteenth century.⁹² Secretary Amico Taegio belonged to a family coming from the town of Novara, which had extensively cooperated with the Sforza throughout the second half of the fifteenth century.⁹³ Coadjutor Ascanio Alfieri was son of Giacomo,⁹⁴ who had been chamber secretary to duke Galeazzo Maria.⁹⁵ Another coadjutor of the chancery of Francesco II, also named Giacomo Alfieri, is likely to have been related to (possibly the son of) Ascanio. Coadjutor Girolamo Rozzoni was the nephew of the *primo segretario*, Bartolomeo.⁹⁶ Clerk Evangelista Imperiale was probably related to Girolamo Imperiale, active in the chancery in 1499.⁹⁷ Finally, looser past relationships could involve Gian Giacomo Sironi, possibly the grandson of Giacomo Sironi, close to duchess Bianca Maria Sforza since the 1440s, and chancery clerk in 1470.⁹⁸

It is no coincidence that two clerks came directly from the entourage of Girolamo Morone. One of them was Girolamo Bertone, who had been so close to Morone as to look after the latter's family while the future *Gran Cancelliere* was escaping from Milan, following a rift in the relationship with the French after 1516.⁹⁹ The other was Galeazzo

88 ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 68, l. 81, 1522 September 18.

89 As reported in Argelati 1743, vol. 1, col. 680

90 Leverotti 2002, 230.

91 Covini 2015, 91-93.

92 Sitoni di Scozia, *Theatrum genealogicum familiarium illustrium, nobilium et civium inclytæ urbis Mediolani* (MS in ASMi: 1705), l. 379.

93 Santoro 1948, 297.

94 ASMi, *Registri ducali*, 68, l. 175, 1522 November 20.

95 Santoro 1948, 54.

96 Verga 1893, 32.

97 Santoro 1939, 78-79.

98 Bassino and Frati 1971-1972-1973, 252-253.

99 Promis and Müller 1863, letters n. CCXVIII, CCXXV, and CCXXXII.

Capra, who had been the personal secretary of Morone before becoming the most appreciated intellectual in Francesco II's circle (on his intellectual activity, see pp. 125-126).¹⁰⁰

Hence, what emerges is an 'old boys network.' The choice of the chancery members between 1522 and 1525 had followed the same restoring attitude that had driven the organisation of the chancery structure and hierarchy, being strongly based on the continuity with a tradition rooted in the second half of the fifteenth century. There are only three clerks who cannot be immediately connected to a pre-existent pattern of allegiance to the Sforza: Giorgio Corio, who worked in the financial chancery, Giovanni Paolo de Scarli, and Paolo Verano—Scarli and Verano belonging to the political chancery.

Seen from the point of view of Francesco II, the resilience of a network like this was certainly positive, insofar as it demonstrated the unconditional loyalism of some portions of Lombard society. However, what stands out is also the sense of isolation surrounding this group. We know that the return of the Sforza had been preceded by a relentless work of persuasion—mostly directed by Morone—of the key-families of Milan and its Duchy.¹⁰¹ However, no outsiders or newcomers were co-opted in the ducal chancery. This was a clear sign of the overall skepticism towards the stability of the Sforza restoration. No one seems to have been willing to compromise himself by joining Francesco's inner circle, because the risk of failure was too high and the potential reward too low.

2. 1531–1535: new presences

How was the chancery network composed in the last phase of the Sforza restoration, between 1531 and 1535? Did the chancery have the same, strong Sforza bias that characterised it between 1522 and 1525? As anticipated in the general introduction, the answers to these questions are to be found in the chancery *ruoli* dated between 1531 and 1537 preserved at the *Archivio di Stato* of Milan.¹⁰² These *ruoli* have one main positive feature: they are five. Hence, they offer reliable evidence of the great majority of the people that partook in chancery activities between 1531 and 1535. However, the fact that the *ruoli* are undated is problematic, because it is impossible to establish whether four chancery members (secretaries Giacomo Pierio and Giacomo Valgrana, clerks A. M. Suardi and Aluisio Flamengo) were active in the chancery before Francesco II's death in

100 Capra 1539, VI.

101 *Ibid.*, XI-XIV.

102 ASMi, *Atti di governo, Finanza, Parte Antica*, 857.

November 1535. All the others either belonged to the chancery since the early 1520s, or are listed in *ruoli* containing the name of someone whose date of death is known, setting a *terminus ante quem*. As it is clear from Chart 2.2 (p. 89), knowing the date of death of Giacomo Picenardi (27 November 1531) has been especially useful;¹⁰³ Girolamo Pescia was active in the chancery before the end of 1535, because he is listed with Camillo Ghilini, who died in the Summer of that year.¹⁰⁴ From this list, we realise that the chancery network of the 1530s had changed its nature. Half of the body of the chancery members (thirteen out of twenty-five) was made of new entries, and their connection with the Sforza is far less evident than before. Surnames like Bellabocca, Langhi, Pescia, and Pierio are not to be found in the repertoires of office-holders compiled by Caterina Santoro, and families like Suardi and Medici had never had chancery members. The only solid connection with the previous periods is coadjutor Bartolomeo Gadio, who is explicitly listed as ‘the nephew of sir Giorgio,’ former beneficial secretary. Therefore, the exiled years of 1526–1530 caused a turn over within the chancery ranks. But what kind of turn over was this? Following the tenuous (if existent) archival traces of all the newcomers would have been a long and potentially unfruitful task. Hence, it is more useful to focus on two specific names, whose presence is both surprising and revealing: Peter Merbel and Giacomo Valgrana.

Peter Merbel was not Italian, but of Germanic origin. An absolute novelty, considering that until now we have dealt exclusively with characters coming either from Milan or from its Duchy. Merbel is undoubtedly an interesting character. According to Federico Chabod, he is likely to have been one of the ‘hidden’ promoters of the Reformation among the highest-ranking cadres of the State of Milan during the 1540s and 1550s, which also caused him the undesired attention of the Inquisition.¹⁰⁵ Philosopher and physician Lucillo Filalteo (d. 1578) mentioned Merbel as an expert in concocting medical remedies.¹⁰⁶ In addition, he was in correspondence with Erasmus, whom he informed of Francesco II’s death on 8 November 1535.¹⁰⁷ Merbel’s cooptation in the chancery probably happened in either 1530 or 1531. Did this German secretary physically represent Charles V’s control on the last phase of the Sforza restoration?

There is no need to put this as a question for another foreign presence in the chancery, that of the Spanish secretary Giacomo Valgrana. Indeed, in this case, the

103 Forcella 1889–1893, vol. 1 (1889), 97, n. 136.

104 Picinelli 1670, 101.

105 Chabod 1971a, 332–333 and 336.

106 Filalteo 1565, 17.

107 Allen and Allen 1906–1958, vol. 11 (1947), letter n. 3070.

Chart 2

(the names in italics are those of the chancery members present in Chart 1)

	Name	Rank	Active in the chancery since
1	<i>Rozzoni, Bartolomeo</i>	First secretary	1522-1525
2	<i>Ricci, Giovanni Angelo</i>	Chamber secretary	1522-1525
3	<i>Alfieri, Giacomo</i>	Clerk, then secretary	1522-1525
4	<i>Capra, Galeazzo</i>	Secretary	1522-1525
5	<i>Ghilini, Camillo</i>	Secretary	1522-1525
6	<i>Imperiale, Evangelista</i>	Secretary	1522-1525
7	Langhi, Melchione	Secretary	Before 27 November 1531
8	Merbel, Peter	Secretary	Before 27 November 1531
9	Monti, Agostino	Clerk, then secretary	Before 27 November 1531
10	<i>Picenardi, Giacomo</i>	Secretary	Circa 1529
11	Pierio, Giacomo	Secretary	?
12	<i>Robbio, Giovanni Stefano</i>	Secretary	1522-1525
13	<i>Rozzoni, Gerolamo</i>	Clerk, then secretary	1522-1525
14	<i>Taegio, Amico</i>	Secretary	1522-1525
15	Valgrana, Giacomo	Secretary	?
16	<i>Alfieri, Ascanio</i>	Clerk	1522-1525
17	Fiamengo, Aloisio	Clerk	?
18	Medici, Giovanni Antonio	Clerk	Before 27 November 1531
19	<i>Scarli, Giovanni Paolo de</i>	Clerk	1522-1525
20	Suardi, A. M.	Clerk	?
21	Alfieri, Giovanni Gaspare	Coadjutor	Before 27 November 1531
22	Bellabocca, Francesco Maria	Coadjutor	Before 27 November 1531
23	Busseto, Massimiliano	Coadjutor	Before 27 November 1531
24	Gadio, Bartolomeo	Coadjutor	Before 27 November 1531
25	Pescia, Girolamo	Coadjutor	Before 1535

connection with Charles V is explicit. Valgrana acted as personal secretary for the imperial general Antonio de Leyva, who would be governor of the State of Milan between November 1535 and September 1536.¹⁰⁸ But unfortunately, it is impossible to establish whether Valgrana entered the secret chancery when Francesco II was still alive, because the only *terminus ante quem* of the *ruolo* in which he appears is constituted by the presence of Galeazzo Capra, who died in 1537. But whenever it may have happened, the quick cooptation of the Spanish secretary demonstrates how the secret chancery had been targeted by the emperor and his men. Apropos this question, it is worth noticing that Filippo Argelati—an erudite eighteenth-century historian—in his catalogue of biographies of the most famous Milanese writers, suggested that Antonio de Leyva may have poisoned secretary Camillo Ghilini because of the latter's strong Sforza loyalism.¹⁰⁹ Argelati does not bring any evidence to support such speculation, but again, the credit he gave to this suspicion suggests that he thought that the chancery had actually been at the centre of a political struggle during the early 1530s. This struggle resulted in a chancery network less compact than 1522–1525, when the duke and Morone were free to reinstate a group of Sforza partisans in office. Eventually, the great majority of the chancery members of the 1530s would continue their career after the end of the Sforza dynasty, probably because (unlike Ghilini?) they quietly transferred their allegiance to the new rulers of the State.

To sum up, the analysis of the Sforza chancery network under Francesco II offers results parallel to those emerging from the analysis of the chancery system (Chapter 1). On the one hand, studying the evolution of the network of chancery members throws light on political-institutional aspects of the Sforza restoration; on the other, and more generally, the fact that networks were so important to the functioning of chanceries tells much about the chanceries' very nature.

As far as political-institutional aspects are concerned, the fact that the chancery network between 1522 and 1525 was strongly Sforza-biased confirms that Francesco II initially attempted an actual restoration of the fifteenth-century status quo. A circle of Sforza loyalists who had been ousted from power during the French dominations (1499–1512 and 1515–1521) was ready to take power back after more than twenty years. Subsequently, during the years 1531–1535, the break-up of this tight-knit network was the logical consequence of Francesco's re-positioning. The chancery ceased to be the

¹⁰⁸ His name appears in a petition registered in ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 194, l. 25, 1535 June 13.

¹⁰⁹ Argelati 1743, vol. 1, col. 680.

stronghold of an independent Sforza party, and became open to newcomers and 'foreign' presences that reflected the rising influence of German and Spanish characters linked to Charles V.

As far as the chancery's nature is concerned, the importance of networks demonstrates that chanceries cannot be conceived as offices of bureaucratic kind, but were in fact fluid socio-political hubs. Being a chancery member did not depend on technical expertise, but on a web of political connections and allegiances. I elaborate on this point in the conclusion to Part I as a whole.

Conclusion

In the introduction to this part of the thesis, I maintained that the reconstruction of the chancery of Francesco II had three aims. The first was delineating the essential contours of my object of study. The second aim was carrying out a documentary history of the Sforza restoration that would allow to improve the understanding of Francesco's ambitions and limits. The third and more general aim was beginning to problematise the straightforward conception of the chancery as an office of bureaucratic kind.

As far as the essential contours of Francesco II's chancery are concerned, we now know all the chancery-related concepts, elements and characters that will come up in the rest of the thesis. We know how the chancery was structured; we have a clear idea of how big (or, in Francesco's case, how small) the chancery was; we know what a *Gran Cancelliere*, a secretary, a clerk, a coadjutor and an usher were and did; and we familiarised ourselves with the names and the socio-political background of the members of the chancery.

As for the usefulness of carrying out a documentary history of the Sforza restoration, what has emerged with great clarity is that the study of the Sforza chancery is the key to re-evaluate the political conduct of Francesco II. The great receptivity of the chancery to the ever-changing political situation demonstrates that the tag 'decline' is inadequate to frame Francesco's history as duke. The chancery indisputably struggled to survive in an age of turmoil and underwent a clear downsizing if compared to that of the Sforza golden age, but the rationale that can be detected behind the chancery's evolution also shows that it remained an important political hub.

I will not re-state here the outlines of such re-evaluation. What I want to focus on now is the historiographical contribution of my work. On the one hand, I join the stream of publications that have recently revised the negative scholarly attitude towards early-sixteenth-century Milan. As noted in the general introduction, Massimo Carlo Giannini and Letizia Arcangeli have already demonstrated the necessity of interpreting the critical 1500–1535 period through constructive key-words like 'dialectic'¹¹⁰ and 'experimentation,'¹¹¹ rather than through the anachronistic concept of 'crisis of the Italian liberty' utilized in all traditional scholarship and epitomised in the *Storia di Milano* of 1957 (see above, p. 36 n. 48).

110 Giannini 2001.

111 Arcangeli 2004.

On the other hand, though, I also add a new and more complex perspective on the period. In fact, while Giannini and Arcangeli have focused on the attempts of *local* institutions and patriciates to survive the crisis of the Italian Wars—attempts that are natural, and somehow unsurprising—I have shown that there still existed a Sforza governmental and social network that played a creative political-institutional role throughout the 1520s and the 1530s. The existence of this Sforza network escaped the teleological perspective that saw the decline of the Sforza dynasty as inevitable. By contrast, I have demonstrated that the political (and documentary) posture of Francesco II and his loyalists, especially during the early 1530s, actively influenced the institutional order of the Duchy of Milan in a long-lasting way.

However—and I come to the third of the aims listed above—the study of Francesco II's chancery has a relevance that transcends early-sixteenth-century Milan insofar as it begins to corroborate my starting research hypothesis: looking at what *concretely* happened in chanceries and around chancery documents has the potential to re-frame the notion of what a chancery was, and to give a new image (more nuanced and participatory) to political and institutional history.

In Chapter 1, this has been evident in the passage from the analysis of chancery structure and size to the analysis of chancery hierarchy. As soon as we have leave abstractions to focus on how the chancery worked in practice, it has been clear that chancery members were no mere scribes providing a clerical service, but true shareholders of power. Being part of the chancery meant having political and economic ties with the duke and with an entire network of Sforza followers. 'Network' has indeed been the key-word of Chapter 2: looking at the background of chancery members allows us to reinforce strongly the claim that the chancery was not only an office directed from above through a vertical chain-of-command, but also a fluid social and political hub where allegiance and family bonds mattered more than technical expertise.

The main question, then, is what to make of these insights: should we dismiss them, thus maintaining an abstract structure-based approach to chanceries, or should we insist on analysing the significance of the concrete dynamics of what happened there? The evidence I have found so far clearly invites switching the emphasis—unlike most histories of chanceries—from abstract structures to practices.

Part II – Chancery Practices

In Part I, I have begun a problematisation of the chancery by looking at its insiders: I have assessed how they interpreted their role, and their socio-political background. However, another crucial issue that emerged in the analysis of the Taverna charter—the document I used to open this thesis—was the relationship between the chancery and its *outsiders*. Indeed, the most surprising thing about the Taverna charter was that a distinctively 'chancery document' was materially acted upon *outside* the chancery before its completion, and handled by people who were *not* chancery members. (p. 11-14).

This fact is, in a sense, 'shocking'—but also fascinating. Indeed, one of the most basic convictions deriving from a bureaucratic conception of chanceries is that there must be a clear conceptual *and* material separation between inside and outside. In a bureaucratic written political culture, it is precisely that separation that gives authority to a document, because the document comes from inside and is meant to shape the world outside as a tool of government. By contrast, direct cooperation between officers and outsiders to an office is in itself an infraction, invalidating the whole process of document-making. But has it always been the case? And was it the case of the Sforza chancery? Once we scope flaws in such a fundamental principle of bureaucracy, we should investigate if they were occasional or structural.

The relationship between chancery and outsiders, as shown again by the Taverna charter, was based on practices. I have already offered a definition of practices in the general introduction (p. 15), but it is worth resuming it here, because 'practice' will be the key-notion for the whole Part II. Practices are behaviours: informal ways of doing something that a community of participants (or part thereof) comes to consider acceptable and share not because of formal codification, but through reiteration. In medieval and early modern Italy, *consuetudine* (literally 'custom') was the term typically used to define a practice. The most essential trait of practices is that they are alternative (and often in opposition) to formal frameworks of action provided by structures and rules; as a consequence, representations of the activities to which practices, structures and rules are related usually tend to *exclude* practices and include structures and rules.

In Chapter 1 and 2, we have already encountered something that could be compared to a tension between structures and practices. For example, we have seen that while chancery hierarchy (structure) foresaw a top-down chain-of-command from the highest chancery rank to the lowest, duke Francesco II could owe money to one of his

subordinates, secretary Bartolomeo Rozzoni; or that the fluid social network that determined who was going to become chancery member was as significant as (if not more significant than) the rigid chancery organisation in functional branches. And yet, despite these important insights, the chancery largely remains a 'black box:' an object of which we grasp the contours (structure, size, hierarchy, networks of members) but that has largely unknown internal mechanisms. In the next two chapters, I will throw light on these mechanisms by looking at proper chancery practices: informal (but accepted) ways of frequenting the chancery and making documents. What were these practices? How essential were they to chancery functioning? Can they further change the idea of chancery that we have begun problematising in Part I?

To answer these questions, a first thing to do is tackling new sources. Until now, I have looked at sources produced *by* the chancery (the *ruoli*, the *Registri delle Missive* and the *Registri Ducali*). However, we need sources *describing* the chancery to get a first substantial sense of how it functioned. From this point of view, in the case of the Sforza chancery, two sources stand out. One is a corpus of chancery regulations (*Ordines*) compiled during the Sforza golden age. The other is a memoir describing the activities of the chancery (bearing the modern title *Informazioni sulle incombenze dei segretari ducali*, henceforward *Informazioni*) which, as I shall explain, was probably written to reorganise the chancery of Francesco II as he first returned to Milan in 1522. I have already given some basic details about these sources (pp. 42-44), and I am going to further discuss them (pp. 98-102 and 105-107).

For the moment, what is important to highlight is that both the *Ordines* and the *Informazioni*, despite having often been read as proof of the institutionalisation and bureaucratisation of the Sforza chancery, in fact reveal a great deal about chancery practices and their pervasiveness. On the one hand, the *Informazioni* do so overtly, according to their nature of pragmatic memoir; on the other hand, even though the *Ordines*, being regulations, clearly aim at curbing the role of informal practices in chancery functioning, I will show that it is possible to read them against the grain to understand the mismatch between official rules and actual behaviours.

In the case of both the *Informazioni* and the *Ordines*, then, we get the chance to look in the chancery black box. The most important thing that emerges is that, in practice (and unlike in theory,) the chancery was not a place of separation—of insiders from outsiders, of document-making from decision-making, of administrative functions from non-administrative functions—but rather a place of *integration*, one where insiders and

outsiders met, discussed, negotiated. This fact, if put at the centre of historical analysis, has the potential of re-framing our understanding of Renaissance written political culture in a new and compelling way. Therefore, Chapter 3 will be devoted to the analysis of a range of social, political, and cultural practices undertaken in the chancery.

Social practices in the chancery are best grasped through the *Ordines*. More specifically, this source will prove especially useful for reflecting on an apparently simple problem which, however, scholarship has left unaddressed: was the Sforza 'secret' chancery actually secret? In other words: could outsiders physically access the chancery? How systematically, and how easily? What kind of outsiders could do so: only those with strong connections to the duke and his aides, or also more casual outsiders? What were outsiders allowed to do in the chancery? I regard outsiders' accessibility to the chancery as a 'social' question (even though it has clear political implications) because it generally interrogates how disciplined was the relationship between the authorities and their subjects.

In the second section of the chapter, the reading of the *Informazioni* will make things more strictly political. Indeed, the *Informazioni* describe in great detail the inextricable intertwining between documentary and governmental practices. How directly was the chancery involved in important political processes like decision-making? How formal and regulated was the relationship between chancery members and political influencers other than the duke? Who were these influencers? Answering these questions will allow me to single out some essential traits of the act of making documents in the Renaissance—traits that stand in sharp contrast with our contemporary idea of official document-making.

more generally, what is very interesting about the *Informazioni* is how precisely they identify information and communication as the elements that put the chancery at the core of governmental practices. Since I am going to use the terms 'information' and 'communication' extensively in the second section of the chapter, it is appropriate to quickly define them here. With the term 'information,' I mean the message—or the piece of news or of knowledge—detached from the medium; with the term 'communication,' I mean the modes (and acts) of transmission and sharing of information, which necessarily happened through a medium and, crucially, constituted an activity involving human interaction. In medieval and early modern Venice, the word *comunicazione* also had a specific institutional meaning, that of indicating the passage of information from one governing body to another. It can therefore be argued that the chancery managed

processes of *comunicazione* among Sforza institutions (or among individuals with authority in the Sforza orbit) even though these processes hardly followed fixed rules.¹

Finally, in the third section of the chapter, I will rely on literature and on a variety of other sources to remark that it would be very limiting to see the chancery exclusively as a centre of production of official documents. Indeed, chancery members, either collectively or individually, undertook a series of (broadly defined) cultural practices that made the chancery an autonomous and socially-varied community with a civic role in the city of Milan, and a centre of scholarship that remained lively even during the turmoil of the Sforza restoration. Should not this distinctive variety of functions have an impact on the way we think the chancery?

To sum up, at the end of Chapter 3, a thorough analysis of practices will have powerfully confirmed what we started to glimpse in Part I through the study of chancery hierarchy and networks: the chancery not only was an instrument strictly commanded from above by a well-delineated authority, but also—and consistently—a remarkably porous hub, where the dukes' wordpower could become an unexpectedly collective asset.

However, applying the notion of practice to chancery studies not only serves to demonstrate that the role of the chancery as an instrument of the authority was only one piece of a much bigger picture; it also serves to realise that when the chancery did act as such—as the spreader of the duke's wordpower—the act of deploying documents around the Sforza Duchy was not a neutral and strictly logistical endeavour, but rather a meaningful performance. Therefore, in Chapter 4, I will argue that the great effort Francesco II put in communicating in writing with the peripheries of his dominion was often more a symbolic (yet very important) practice of authority than a pragmatic exercise of governance.

At the end of Part II, we will have achieved a new and more nuanced perspective on what a chancery was and did. In Part III, I will then investigate the relationship between the complexity of chancery practices and the material aspect of chancery documents, or products.

¹ See Burke 1987, 3-24 ('Introduction'), and especially 5-6; on the definition of 'information,' 'communication' and *comunicazione* see also De Vivo 2007, 2-3.

Chapter 3 – Social, Political, and Cultural Practices in the Chancery

1. Social practices: the openness of the chancery

To begin analysing the internal mechanisms of the chancery, it is worth starting from the most well-known source dealing with its functioning: the *Ordines*. The *Ordines* (literally 'Orders') consist of eight self-standing sets of regulations compiled between 1453 and 1475 under the direction of *primo segretario* Cicco Simonetta. Two sets of regulations regard the secret chancery as a whole: the first is entitled *Ordines primi et veteres ducalis cancellarie secretae* ('First and Old *Ordines* of the Ducal Secret Chancery,' 1453), the second is entitled *Renovatio et additio facta in ordinibus cancellarie* ('Renewal and Extension of the Chancery *Ordines*,' 1465). The other six sets of regulations regard specific chancery ranks, or figures whose activity was strictly related to that of the chancery. In chronological order, we have an *Ordo* for *registratores* (1455), one for ushers (1456), one for mounted messengers (1461), one for judicial secretaries (1472), one for the chancery of the *Consiglio di Giustizia* ('Council of Justice,' a Sforza council active during the golden age, 1475) and one for the 'seal-keeper' chancery clerk (date unknown).²

Being regulations, the *Ordines* aimed at disciplining the work of the chancery. They did so in a methodical way: all chancery members had their tasks minutely described, to the point that even lunch breaks and night shifts were duly regulated, and—for example—it is written that the *registratores* should have had the horse ready at all times in order to follow the duke in his sudden displacements. Everything, in the chancery, was set to run efficiently and strictly hierarchically, so that the sovereign could exercise his wordpower at any time. In light of this, historians have often taken the *Ordines* as proof that the Sforza chancery of the golden age had distinctively bureaucratic traits.³

However, treating the *Ordines* as a reliable reflection of reality has its risks. Indeed, there are passages in the *Ordines*'s text clearly indicating that Cicco Simonetta had a strong *ideal* of chancery in mind, and wished to impose it. For example, one thing that stands out is how Simonetta insists on comparing the chancery to an ecclesiastical environment. He explicitly writes that clerks should have behaved and obeyed as monks, and that the seat of the chancery should have been more disciplined than a *religio*—a

2 In BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, the *Ordines* are to be found between f. 86 and f. 117. For the *registratores* and the 'seal-keeper' clerk, see p. 79. For the *Consiglio di Giustizia*, see p. 112.

3 See Santoro 1968, 209-213. On lunch breaks and night shifts, see BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, l. 89 (for *registratores*), l. 92 (for ushers) . On the *registratores*'s horses, l. 90.

polysemantic term meaning both 'religion' and 'sacred space'.⁴ In this sense, the *Ordines* not only work as mere regulations, but also as an ambitious ideological expression propounding a system of political-cultural values.

This claim can be supported with a material analysis of the *Ordines* as textual objects. Indeed, unlike the great majority of Sforza registers, the three extant manuscripts in which the *Ordines* are gathered are made of fine parchment, and written in an accurate italic script with coloured letters (fig. 3.1, p. 100).⁵ Furthermore, up to 1478, the individual or collective oaths of fidelity taken by chancery members were recorded therein (fig. 3.2, p. 101). Therefore, the *Ordines* were objects of display with a ceremonial function. Not only their contents, but also their physical form and use testify their essentially 'monumental' nature.

How can the *Ordines* serve the purpose of opening the chancery black box then? From these remarks, it seems clear that they overwhelmingly deal with abstract rules and representation rather than informal practices. Francesco Senatore, too, argues that the *Ordines* are of little use when it comes to grasping how writings were actually made, handled and preserved. According to him, scholars researching documentary practices should look at more pragmatic chancery registers and at correspondences rather than focusing on solemn regulations.⁶ And yet, like all normative sources—and especially those belonging to the Ancien Régime—the *Ordines* can be fruitfully read against the grain. In other words, we can try to read them to get a sense of what violations they wished to prevent, and how pervasive these violations were. If the *Ordines* insist on specific aspects of chancery discipline, it is likely that the chancery lacked discipline precisely in those aspects.

In this perspective, the fact that one recurrent preoccupation of the *Ordines* was preventing aliens from physically accessing the chancery becomes extremely interesting. It signals that chancery practices foresaw a systematic exchange between the chancery's inside and outside, so that chancery rules tried to contain such exchange. As anticipated, I consider this as a broadly social issue, because it regards the tone of the relationship between authority and subjects. Some rules are particularly emblematic, and it is worth analysing them in detail. They reveal the concrete ways in which the chancery, despite its

4 BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, ff. 95-96: 'Et primo quia mos est professis, et monacis, allisque regularibus qui superiorem recognoscunt, ut precipue sub obedientia militent, seque absentare minime possint a locis suis (...) qui locus [the chancery] omni observantissima religione prestantior esse debet.'

5 For the location of the manuscripts in which the *Ordines* are gathered, see p. 42. I use BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325 when I need to cite passages from the *Ordines*.

6 Senatore 1998, 87.

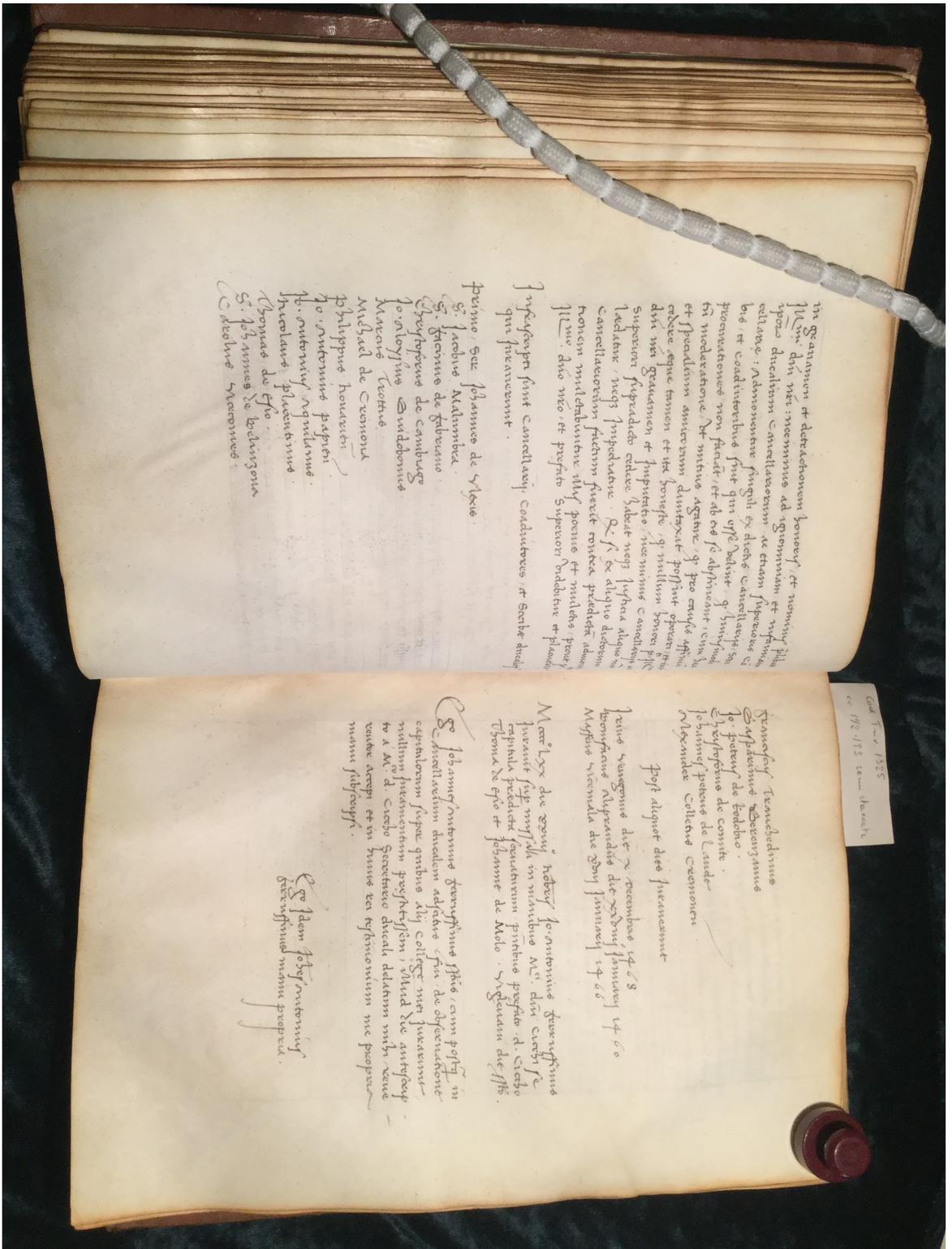


Fig. 3.2: BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, l. 89. Transcription of the oaths of fidelity sworn by chancery members at the end of the *Ordines primi et veteres*

self-styled secrecy, in fact was a place open to outsiders with various degrees of 'outsideness.'

A first common practice—perhaps the most venial—was bringing unauthorised *pueri* ('youngsters') to the chancery as assistants, to let them fulfil venial clerical tasks, like transcribing the original documents in the registers. In theory, this was prohibited;⁷ however, we know that the chancery *cursus honorum* could easily start with some years of unpaid apprenticeship. The distinction between an authorised trainee and an occasional unskilled labourer was likely to be minimal.⁸ In an interesting letter to duke Ludovico Sforza, Giacomo Cattaneo, newly-appointed secretary to the chancery of the *Consiglio di Giustizia*, bitterly complained about the uncontrollable presence of *garzoni* (assistants) in the chancery:

The only old bad habit that damages the dignity of this place [the chancery] is that all the clerks—they are fifteen in total—keep at least one *garzono* in the chancery, while they [the clerks] leave [their workplace] at their own pleasure, and let the *garzoni* write and transcribe letters (...) and this is shameful not only because clerks do not do their job, but also because it generates great confusion, because letters are badly written, and possibly there take place some inappropriate rackets (*extorsioni*).⁹

Cattaneo is remarkably precise in listing the problems associated with the practice of keeping *garzoni*: it is first of all a question of principle, because clerks are paid to not-do their job; secondly, it is a technical question: the quality of chancery letters worsens if the *garzoni* write them on behalf of more expert clerks; finally, we understand that *garzoni* demanded more money than they should for writing letters (in the final chapter, I will focus on the circulation of money in the chancery.)

Keeping the focus on unauthorised presences, the attention turns to the *Ordo* for ushers—who, as we have seen (pp. 77-78), were the designated chancery warders. Some more substantial intrusions begin to emerge. Here, the rules show an interesting double standard. At first, they enunciate a very drastic principle, in line with their general solemn tone; but then follows a long list of exceptions, from which we scope the informal

7 BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, l. 99: 'et ideo admonentur singul ex dictis cancellariis et coadiutoribus quorum sua putaverint interesse quod cum diligentia attendere debeant in habendo solertem et diligentem curam registris ipsis, ac ad registrandum littera ipsos tangente suis propriis manibus, et non a pueris, vel alicuius personis non salariatis.'

8 Leverotti 1994a, 328. Around mid-sixteenth century (1566), the *Ordo* of the chancery of the Senate explicitly foresaw that the lowest ranking members of the chancery—the *scriptores*—should have worked for free: see *Ordines excellentissimi Senatus* 1743, 79.

9 ASMi, *Carteggio Estero, Venezia*, 1315, 1491 November 2: 'Solamente vederia derogare alla dignità de questo loco una corruptela vechia, che tutti li Cancelleri quali sonno quindecim tenevano uno garzono almancho per chadiuno in cancellaria, et loro se ne andaveno pro arbitrio ad solazo et lassivano scrivere et transcrivere le lettere alli garzoni (...) donde ne nasceva grande confusione, et dessere le lettere male scripte, et forse de qualche extorsione indebite ultra la indignita de la cosa che li cancelleri non facesseno lofficio suo.'

practices undermining the principle itself. One rule states that ushers were not to let ‘any person to ascend to the desks and to write, or doing anything else, except the very writers of the chancery.’ But ‘others, who are familiar [to the chancery]’ were authorised. In addition, ‘other people worth of reputation’ were also free to hold the quill, even if—we understand—they were not familiar to the chancery.¹⁰ A second rule urged ushers not to admit ‘any person to the chancery;’ but once again, exceptions included ‘the familiar ones’ (indicating that the exception was in fact a rule) and ‘those summoned by the clerks for speaking and fulfilling their tasks’ (showing that consultation with outsiders was actually contemplated.)¹¹ Similarly, in the *Ordo* for the chancery of the *Consiglio di Giustizia*, one rule forbade clerks to ‘give *long* audiences’ to outsiders inside the chancery (so audiences were admitted if quick,) and suggested the same clerks to meet their acquaintances outside the chancery hall (again implying that chancery clerks were regularly in contact with the outside world while on duty.)¹²

However, it is in the second general *Ordo* for the secret chancery (the *Renovatio*) that the already compromised ideal of the chancery as an isolated space clashes most spectacularly with chancery practices. Indeed, one rule recommended clerks and coadjutors to behave properly, explaining the recommendation with a long and detailed list of outsiders who—surprisingly enough—habitually witnessed chancery activities. ‘[I]llustrious princes, and notables, barons, several ambassadors, nobles, merchants, plebeians and ordinary people, clerics of every rank and condition, and other subjects of our beloved most illustrious lord’ were given access to the chancery.¹³ The list, as it is evident, was intended to cover a whole spectrum of Renaissance society, thus highlighting that the chancery could be a very open and crowded place. Not only the elite, but also ordinary people could physically come close to wordpower. The recurrent misbehaviour that originated the need of drawing the list is also interesting, as it included ‘expressions of indecent obscenity,’ as well as ‘degenerate customs,’ and the habit of handling books and registers carelessly, touching them with ink-stained hands and throwing them to each

10 BTMi, Cod. *Triv.* 1325, l. 92: ‘Item che non lasseno assendere alcuna persona suso li banchi ad scrivere, ne ad fare altra cosa se non li proprii scriptori de cancellaria, et li altri che sono soliti de venire (...) ma accadendo che essi consueti o vero altre persone degne de reputatione volesseno scrivere, li lassino scrivere liberamente.’

11 *Ivi*: ‘Item che essi uschieri non admettano alcuna persona alla cancellaria se non li consueti, et quelli che fossero domandati per li cancelleri per volerli parlare et fare le expeditione occurrente.’

12 *Ibid.*, l. 116: ‘che in cancellaria non se dia *longa* audientia per li cancelleri, ma se dia de fora sotto la sala.’ [emphasis added]

13 *Ibid.*, l. 99: ‘Illustri principes, et proceres, barones, diversi oratores, nobiles, mercatores, plebei et populares, religiosi cuiuscumque gradus et condicionis, ceterique subditi prelibati Ill.mi domini nostri declinare noscuntur (...).’

other from desk to desk—and even through windows (*fenestras*).¹⁴ Therefore, chancery insiders definitely not always were the obedient and committed monks they were expected to resemble. This is so true that the *Renovatio* foresaw a proper 'surveillance system:' ushers and unidentified 'servants' were required to report any misbehavior they witnessed among clerks and coadjutors.¹⁵

Hence, despite the effort of the *Ordines* effort to keep order, the chancery seems to have been a very unruly and porous place. It is crucial to note that this situation had one visible consequence directly in the sources: in the *Registri delle Missive*, the signature *advenam* (literally 'stranger') occasionally comes up to overtly signal that a letter—an official letter, bearing the signature of the duke—was materially written by someone who did *not* formally belong to the chancery.¹⁶ Under Francesco II, I was able to find nine transcriptions of letters written by chancery outsiders, all dated between August and November 1525.¹⁷ Interestingly enough, four of them have the aim of forwarding a petition to a specific office, urging its ready consideration. In such cases, we can reasonably hypothesise that the petitioners were so well-connected to the chancery (or to a single chancery member) that they were able to write their own letter of solicitation, and then to get it authenticated, dispatched and registered.

Although Sforza scholars have long been familiar with the *Ordines*, they have always treated the above-mentioned passages in a substantially anecdotal way. Caterina Santoro, for example, repeatedly cites chancery members' misbehaviour in her work, but she does so only to quickly sketch vivid images of chancery environment, without going any further.¹⁸ My position is different. I am convinced that this evidence from the *Ordines* sheds light on a crucial question: the chancery, in addition to being 'the assembly where all the *arcana* [secret affairs] of the prince [were] managed,'¹⁹ was *also* a very permeable place, with no clear-cut division from the outside world. This is only contradictory for today's bureaucratic mindset; in the Renaissance, it was a fundamental feature of political culture. The power of social practices allowed outsiders to physically access the chancery

14 *Ivi*: '(...) sicuti sunt indecentes sermones oscenitate referti, et degenerati mores, et improbati gestis quibus in attractando impudica manus offendunt, utque mala peioribus addant, libros seu cancellarie registros alter in alterum per fenestras et scabella inicientes (...).'

15 *Ivi*: 'Mandatur quibusque servitoribus et cancellarie hostiariis quod (...) omnes et singulos ex predictis inobservantes (...) referre et reportare debeant.'

16 Leverotti 1994a, 328.

17 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 282, 1525 September 21; *Registri delle Missive*, 222, ll. 225-26, 1525 June 22; l. 242, 1525 June 16; l. 247, 1525 July 6; l. 255, 1525 July 11; *Registri delle Missive* 223, l. 12, 1525 August 4; l. 81, 1525 September 17; l. 127, 1525 October 28; l. 129, 1525 November 1.

18 Santoro 1948, XXIII; Ead. 1956, 525; Ead. 1968, 210.

19 BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, l. 99: 'ubi omnia Illustrissimi domini nostri archana contractantur.'

and tamper with its activities, even if official rules struggled to keep them away from a supposedly quasi-sacred space. Being aware of this is fundamental to get a realistic perspective on the chancery's functioning. more generally, these consideration match and enrich the most recent scholarly perspective on other supposedly segregated spaces that were in fact very permeable, like nunneries.²⁰

To conclude this section, I wish to report one last passage from the *Ordines* to bear in mind that having physical access to the chancery was neither the only nor necessarily the most effective way of influencing political-administrative affairs. Indeed, one rule of the *Renovatio* prohibited clerks and coadjutors to facilitate the authentication of outsiders' motions, unlawfully acting as *procuratores* ('agents') or *solicitatores* ('advocates'), taking charge of the interests of their acquaintances.²¹ Hence, simply knowing a low-ranking chancery member could significantly increase the chances of obtaining a document on request. Significantly, secretaries were not mentioned among the usual wrongdoers: this suggests that their role as agents and advocates for a third party was accepted and foreseen. Here, we can clearly grasp the great extent to which private affairs overlapped with public ones, precisely because a proper distinction between 'private' and 'public' did not exist. This distinctively political note calls for the assessment of a range of more specifically political practices in the chancery.

2. Political practices: information and communication in the chancery

As anticipated, the source that offers the best insights on political practices in the chancery are the *Informazioni sulle incombenze dei segretari ducali*. The *Informazioni* are a memoir: an anonymous writer described the functioning of the Sforza chancery of the golden age by summarising how its four main secretaries (in order of appearance, the political, beneficial, financial, and judicial secretary) directed their branches. The fact that secretaries are called by name in the text (Bartolomeo Calco, Giacomo Antiquario, Giovanni Giacomo Ferrufini, Giovanni da Bellinzona) allows us to determine that the memoir refers to the years between 1496 (when Ferrufini was appointed financial secretary) and 1499 (the fall of Ludovico Sforza).²²

As anticipated in the general introduction (p. 44), the original text of the *Informazioni* was destroyed during the Second World War bombings that affected the Trivulziana Library of Milan. Nevertheless, the text has survived in two transcriptions,

20 See for example Laven 2002 and Ead. 2005, especially from p. 97 onwards.

21 *Ibid*, l. 97: 'Item quia multi ex dictis scribis, cancellariis et coadiutoribus se exhibent et constituunt procuratores et sollicitatores rerum privatarum personarum (...).'

22 The date of appointment of Ferrufini as financial secretary is in Santoro 1948, 52.

taken in 1881 and 1939.²³ The latter is incomplete: Caterina Santoro did not transcribe the last paragraph of the original memoir, probably because it did not deal with the organisation of the chancery. However, as we shall soon see, the part omitted by Santoro is important to grasp the memoir's original function.

The *Informazioni* are undated, but a series of details in the text prompt me to claim that they were written under Francesco II. Firstly, a sure *terminus a quo* is 1508, because duke Ludovico Sforza is referred to as already deceased.²⁴ Secondly, there is a reference to a 'notebook (...) which *is* in the possession of Giovanni Giacomo Ferrufini.'²⁵ Since the writer uses the present tense, Ferrufini was in possession of the notebook *at the time* the memoir was written.²⁶ After 1508, Ferrufini was in charge of the financial chancery (and therefore presumably in possession of the notebook) under both Massimiliano (between 1512 and 1515) and Francesco II (between 1522 and 1525.) As a result, we can start hypothesising that the memoir was written during one of these two periods. But we can speculate further: why would one write a precise description of the Sforza-golden-age chancery arrangements years after it ceased to exist? My answer is that the *Informazioni* probably served a pragmatic function. The last paragraph of their text (fortunately transcribed by Porro Lambertenghi) makes this hypothesis very plausible, because the descriptive tone used by the writer turns prescriptive: we find expressions like

[b]y now, one judge *should* suffice for the needs of this office (...). In Milan, *it is appropriate* having two fiscal lawyers and two fiscal prosecutors (...) In the other cities and territories one lawyer *must* suffice.²⁷

The informed writer was recalling some arrangements of the golden-age Sforza administration, adding his own suggestions on how to re-establish and re-adjust them. And this was more to likely happen 22-25 years after the end of Ludovico's reign, under Francesco II, rather than 12-15 years only—especially considering the strong 'restoring attitude' of Francesco during his first phase as duke (pp. 51-54). Porro Lambertenghi and Santoro, too, were of the opinion that the memoir was written between 1522 and 1525.²⁸

Therefore, someone within Francesco II's entourage was re-organising the chancery, and wished to know how it used to work under Ludovico. This fact is paramount for four reasons. Firstly, it clearly demonstrates that there existed a precise

23 Porro Lambertenghi 1881, 713-19; Santoro 1939, 39-43.

24 Santoro, 1939, 39.

25 *Ivi* [emphasis added].

26 I was unable to ascertain Ferrufini's date of death, but he was still alive in 1531, as he is mentioned in ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 225, l. 25, 1531 August 28.

27 Porro Lambertenghi 1881, 718. [emphasis added]

28 *Ibid.*: 713; Santoro 1968, 211.

will of continuity between the chancery of 1450–1499 and that of 1522–1525—something that Sforza historiography has forgotten, its focus being constantly centred on the second half of the fifteenth century. Secondly, the *Informazioni*, normally read exclusively as a source for the 1490s, are in fact also a source for the 1510s or the 1520s. Thirdly, the fact that one of the most complete documents on the functioning of the 1450–1499 chancery was generated during the early-sixteenth-century turmoil shows how political crisis can work as a revealing factor, because the memoir would not have existed without the troubles of Massimiliano and Francesco. Finally, the very need of writing the *Informazioni* implies that the *Ordines* alone were insufficient to reconstruct the actual dynamics of the chancery: this is yet another indication of how the *Ordines* served a symbolic (more than a practical) function.

However, the *Informazioni* are very important not only because of their date, but also because of their contents. Scholarship has scarcely noticed it: Caterina Santoro and Franca Leverotti limit themselves to a rather superficial reading of the *Informazioni*, only appreciating the way in which they clearly divide the chancery in four recognisable branches.²⁹ But more than this, the *Informazioni* offer a compelling perspective on the chancery as a complex hub in constant interaction with the outside world through information and communication practices.

As far as interaction is concerned, it is very significant that the *Informazioni* show a completely different attitude from the *Ordines*. Indeed, while the *Ordines*—a normative text—do not tolerate interaction between the chancery and the outside world (or, as we have seen, do so only reluctantly,) the *Informazioni*—a much more pragmatic text—realistically consider interaction as the natural condition in which the chancery worked.

As far as information and communication practices are concerned, the *Informazioni* offer an interpretive model of chancery activities composed by three distinct phases. The first phase was the reception of information. The author does not use the word *informazione*, but a series of equivalent terms or phrases like *noticia* and *aviso* ('news'), *cose de momento* and *cose de importantia* ('matters of urgency/importance'). The *Informazioni* do not treat the reception of information as a given, but they assume that the ways in which information was inserted in the chancery system determined the different possible patterns of its management.

The management of information was indeed the second phase, and coincided with communication practices: once information had entered the chancery, it had to be

29 Santoro 1948, XXIV-XXV; Leverotti 1994a, 305-308.

communicated and shared, thus becoming the object of decision-making. The author of the *Informazioni* uses four words, substantives or verbs, for defining the communication of information: *scortinii* and *consulte* ('deliberations' and 'consultations'), *tractare* ('to deal with') and *participatione/participare* ('to participate/participating'). This last term is especially important, because it is the closest to the Venetian term *comunicazione* (see p. 96), and because in a sentence the author explicitly distinguishes letters produced *de commissione* ('under commission') of one single person—in that case the duke—from letters produced *con participatione* ('with the participation') of more people.³⁰

It was only when the reception of information and the individual *commissione* or collective *participatione* had unfolded that the chancery approached the third phase—the only one covered by the *Ordines*—i.e. the production of soon-to-be authenticated documents. This phase had its proper name, repeatedly used in the memoir: that of *expeditione*. The term comes from the Latin verb *expedio*, which translates 'to finish,' 'to execute,' 'to deliver.' Therefore, *expeditione* was the proper act of making a document, sometimes objectified to signify 'the document' in itself, and I am going to use this term for the rest of the chapter.

In the next four sub-sections, I am going to explore these three phases in detail. I will show how following the perspective of the *Informazioni* allows us to further refine the idea that we started to grasp in the *Ordines*: that of the chancery as a remarkably dynamic place of integration.

2.1. The reception of information

For two of the four secretaries whose activity is described in the text—political secretary Bartolomeo Calco and judicial secretary Giacomo da Bellinzona—the description of their tasks starts with them taking in news from outside. As far as Calco is concerned, the *Informazioni* could not be clearer. The first thing that we learn is that Calco had the 'chief task' [*cura principale*] of opening the letters of all the deliveries, coming from whatever prince, lord, or anyone, who had to do with the state.³¹ Such practice (not a formal assignment, since there is no trace of it in the *Ordines*), far from being merely technical, was absolutely political. Indeed, the *Informazioni* add that Calco was expected to 'inform the duke of those things that were of importance [*de importantia*], day and night.'³² This passage implies that Calco had the important power of steering the flow of incoming

30 Santoro 1939, 42.

31 *Ibid.*: 39.

32 *Ivi.*

information in the direction that he saw fit. He could share the news he received with the duke, but he could also conceal it: the decision depended on highly discretionary criteria. Calco—and, generally speaking, whoever was influential enough to get his hands on information coming to the chancery—was able to shape duke Ludovico's political knowledge. The situation appears very different from the time of Francesco I Sforza, who was particularly proud of styling himself as 'lord of the news' (*signore di novelle*) as he wanted a strictly personal supervision on all incoming information.³³

The work of judicial secretary Giacomo da Bellinzona, responsible for 'criminal matters' (*le cose criminali*), was also strongly connected to the ability of gathering information. As the *Informazioni* point out, Bellinzona had the task of 'reporting to the excellency of the duke any remarkable homicide or crime that was committed in the dominion,' so that officials could quickly take care of the case.³⁴

On both accounts, the author of the *Informazioni* lucidly considers practices of information reception as a distinct and self-standing phase that often functioned as a starter for activities in and around the chancery. Hence, the chancery is immediately identified with the hub that attracted inputs and only later determined outputs.

2.2. Communication practices in and around the political chancery

Following the routes information took once inside the chancery means unveiling—as if information was a sort of 'historical reagent'—the presence of characters that seldom appear in final chancery documents, but nevertheless prompted the making of documents themselves. As seen above (pp. 102-104), the *Ordines* already hinted at the presence of outsiders, suggesting that the chancery could become a socially-varied place of encounter. However, the *Informazioni* describe what some outsiders did in a much more systematic manner, focusing on their direct political agency. The *Informazioni* show that it was communication, with its overwhelmingly informal practices, that opened the chancery to a vast array of influences.

We left political secretary Calco in the act of receiving information, actively selecting what news to his judgement was unimportant and what was of importance. In this second case, information became the object of communication between the duke and a group of people defined as 'counsellors.' The ultimate aim of communication was that of devising a response, often in writing, which corresponded to the chancery *expeditione*. The author of the *Informazioni* clearly has the idea of a process in mind. Drawing

33 Senatore 1998, 251-263.

34 Santoro 1939, 43.

flowcharts (see below) is the best way of summarising the process's passages.

According to the *Informazioni*, there existed two distinct processes of political communication that ended with an *expeditione*, each one with a number of internal variants: one process depended on the duke, the other did not necessarily include him. The first process started once Calco had opened the incoming letters and decided that they contained 'matters of importance:' the secretary,

night and day, made sure that the most illustrious duke was informed, and the duke shared (*participava*) [the letters] with the counsellors, depending on how he thought the occurrences and cases deserved to be treated; and then, once the appropriate deliberations and consultations (*scortinii et consulte*) had been done, [the duke and the counselors] settled [the affairs the letters related to] through the necessary *expeditione*, or [the duke] ordered to the secretary what was to be done, with or without the concurrence of the counsellors.³⁵

The second process began with a summoning of the counsellors. The summoning took place 'either in the duke's presence, or in the dedicated areas of the chanceries of the said secretary.' In the latter case 'the *expeditioni*, ordered by the counsellors, were carried out, depending on the nature and the circumstances of the cases.'³⁶

As shown in the flowcharts (figg. 3.3, 3.4, p. 111), communication was extremely fluid. The first point worthy of attention is that the author of the *Informazioni* shows that decision- and document-making could constitute one single operation. Indeed, the duke and the counsellors made deliberations *through (mediante) the expeditioni*, and the counsellors could convene directly in the chanceries (the plural form probably refers to the different branches) which apparently had some dedicated areas for hosting meetings. Knowing these concrete dynamics of power is of paramount importance, because they demonstrate how the chancery, far from being the isolated office represented in the *Ordines*, was directly involved in political action.

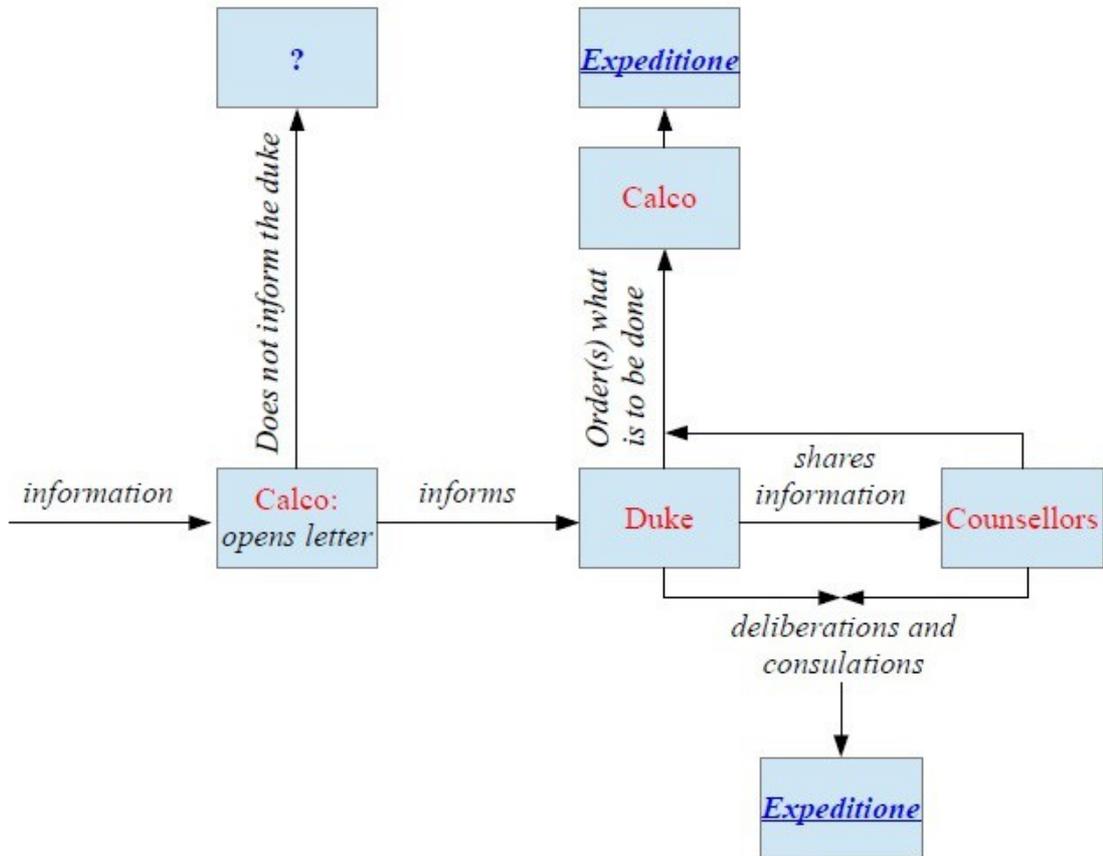
The second point worth of attention is the very tight, yet highly informal relationship between chancery and counsellors, something that—being regulated by communication practices—the *Ordines* ignore altogether. Not only counsellors supervised the *expeditioni* together with secretaries (which caused the overlapping of their respective prerogatives) but they could do so *inside* the chancery and *without* the concurrence of the duke. Here, any separation between the chancery and outsiders is annulled.

This is all the more significant since 'the counsellors' constitute a vague category, much more undefined than it may look at first glance. Even assuming that the *Informazioni* refer to the members of the two major Sforza councils of the golden age—

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 39.

³⁶ *Ibid.*: 39-40 [emphasis added].

Political Chancery – Communication Procedure 1



Political Chancery – Communication Procedure 2

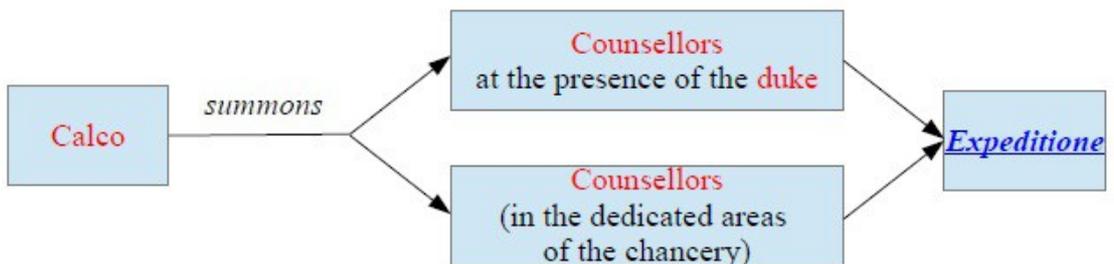


Fig. 3.3, 3.4

the *Consiglio Segreto* ('Privy Council') and the *Consiglio di Giustizia*—would not actually make 'the counsellors' a proper institutional category. Indeed, both the composition and the competences of the councils were extremely contingent;³⁷ the sessions of the *Consiglio Segreto* were not regular, and from the scarce extant evidence at our disposal we know that the number of participants varied greatly from one session to another;³⁸ the influence of each council depended on the specific relationship with the dukes, who often happened to create restricted circles of partisans within the larger councils to segregate opposition.³⁹ In some cases, prominent members coming from *other* polities—e.g. magistrates from the Swiss cities of Bern, Zurich and Luzern—were given access to the *Consiglio Segreto* for reasons of opportunity.⁴⁰ In light of the above, councils are not to be interpreted as proper assemblies, but rather as fluid centres for lobbying whose members were able to influence and control Sforza policies. The fact that counsellors had a direct and continuous relationship with the chancery ultimately means that document-making followed the very volatile relations of power in force in the Sforza court.

This claim can be supported through the analysis of three registers (today preserved among the *Registri delle Missive*, and edited during the 1960s) recording the meetings of a short-lived Sforza council, named *Consiglio de Castello* ('Castle Council'), active between 1477 and 1479.⁴¹ The registers (which are the only extant serial source for the activity of a Sforza council) reveal the details of the inextricable, yet unregulated intertwining between documentary and governmental practices. The *Consiglio de Castello*, for example, was able to annul letters it previously commissioned by simply issuing new ones on the same affair. Evidently, sudden changes in policies reflected political pressures coming from inside or outside the council.⁴² Moreover, the fulfilment of petitions was another issue in which political and documentary conflict coincided. The *Consiglio de Castello* and the *Consiglio Segreto* often received the same petition, issued opposite documents approving and rejecting it at the same time, and then had to debate on which document was valid.⁴³ Generally speaking, the impromptu character of document-

37 Covini 2007, 33 (31-40 for the whole analysis of the Sforza councils).

38 Bueno de Mesquita 1989, 140-141.

39 Covini 2007, 32-35.

40 Santoro 1968, 206.

41 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 131, 134, 143. Alfio Rosario Natale published them as *Acta in Consilio Secreto in Castello Portae Jovis Mediolani*, mainly because they represent the only surviving and serial source on the activity of a Sforza council. See Natale 1962-1969.

42 Natale 1962-1969, vol. 1 (1962), 76. The deliberation begins: '[s]uper causa Gabrielis Migliavache.'

43 *Ibid.*, 78. The register entry begins: '[s]uper controversia comitis Bartholomei Scotti.' *Ibid.*, 81. The register entry begins: '[s]uper supplicatione Nicolai de Cominis.'

making is also testified by the fact that secretaries were summoned and admonished for having issued controversial documents.⁴⁴

2.3. Communication practices in and around the financial chancery

The *Informazioni* also devote space to communication practices in and around the financial branch of the chancery. Indeed, the complexities of money management put the financial branch in contact with many different figures, and this happened following two interestingly opposing necessities. On the one hand, the financial branch needed to control and track the movement of money carefully; as a result, it communicated—mostly in writing—with clearly recognisable officers and institutions. On the other hand, the circulation of money and valuables could also demand secrecy. As a result, the financial branch also substantially dealt with some elusive characters, who deliberately avoided leaving written evidence behind.⁴⁵

In the case of official communication, the *Informazioni* are remarkably precise in describing how the financial branch exchanged information and paperwork with the *Maestri delle Entrate*, the treasurers, the *Referendari* (officers in charge of financial affairs in the peripheral towns/areas of the Duchy), the *Deputati al Denaro* (another financial magistracy that existed under Ludovico), the *Commissari del Sale* (literally 'Commissaries of the Salt,' the trade of salt being one major source of income from the Sforza) and the *dazieri* (excisemen).⁴⁶ Actually, it can be argued that the *Informazioni* are *too* precise in their description. Indeed, they treat the accounting involving the payment of salaries and the funding of diplomacy as a perfectly ordered process; by contrast, scholarship has repeatedly demonstrated how the Sforza system of payments was idiosyncratic—to say the least—and highly dependent on the ever-changing political and economic contingency.⁴⁷ In this respect, the *Informazioni* certainly look more prescriptive than descriptive.

Things become more realistic in the account of a peculiar chancery procedure devised for the distribution of cloths and textiles, which the Sforza used as a form of gift-

44 *Ibid.*, 90. The register entry begins: 'in facto exemptionis magnifici domini Luce de Grimaldis.'

45 For a comprehensive overview on the relationship between accounting and politics from ancient world to the nineteenth century—with a focus on the late medieval and early modern world—see Soll 2014. Ch. 4 ('The Mathematician, the Courtier, and the Emperor of the World') deals with the difficult relationship between courtly culture and good accounting.

46 Santoro 1939, 40-43.

47 The work of Maria Paola Zanoboni is especially useful: she has highlighted the problems between the Sforza and Florentine banker Pigello Portinari (Zanoboni 2009, 52-54 and 66-73); between the Sforza and the Milanese goldsmiths (Ead. 2010a, 367-368); between the Sforza and the Milanese drapers (Ead. 1996, especially Ch. 5: 'Il duca, gli artigiani, i mercanti.')

giving and payment (chancery ushers, for example, were sometimes paid in cloth.)⁴⁸ In this case, financial secretary Ferrufini had to work with two chancery clerks (Gottardo Panigarola and Michele Scaffeta) specialised in expenses for valuable and fashionable objects.⁴⁹ Panigarola and Scaffeta wrote the receipts for the donations of cloths and textiles, which were then signed by Ferrufini; Ferrufini also sent a letter to the *dazieri*, ordering not to tax the outgoing (or incoming) goods, and promising a later payment.⁵⁰

However, the *Informazioni* also describe a third and very interesting set of communication practices—one that a source like the *Ordines* could never mention (fig. 3.5, p. 116):

[w]hen the excellency of the duke, for some reason of his, wished to donate money to someone, [he] orally [*a bocca*], or through his most trusted attendants [*camereri*], ordered to the secretary [Ferrufini], that he commit to the extraordinary or ordinary treasurer, to pay [the recipients of the money]; and this happened because it is not appropriate for such commissions to pass through the hands of many [*vadino per mane di tanti*], and in many cases errors happened, which damaged the excellency of the duke.⁵¹

Two elements make this passage very significant. Firstly, the passage suddenly reveals the presence and the agency in the chancery of the *camerieri*. The *camerieri* were courtiers, intimate attendants to the duke. In the words of Gregory Lubkin, they ‘constituted the core of the ducal household in many ways, and performed a variety of crucial functions related to the duke's daily life.’⁵² These functions included dressing the duke, organising his lodgings, entertaining him, acting as bodyguards and as envoys, spying on the duke's behalf, meeting and escorting foreign dignitaries.⁵³ Furthermore, Lubkin already observed that the *camerieri* also had a position of financial trust, and noted that ‘the more closely to the duke's own person an expenditure was made, the more likely it was to go outside the usual channels. Some very substantial sums were handled by men whose only authority was intimacy with [the duke].’⁵⁴ The *Informazioni* confirm this claim. Even more importantly, they clearly demonstrate that there was an operative exchange between the chancery and figures that belonged to a distinctively *courtly* culture: this contradicts the *Ordines*'s attempts to portray the chancery as an impersonal

48 On gift-giving in general, see Komter 1996; for a famous case study, see Zemon Davis 2000. For the payment of ushers in cloth, see ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, l. 32, 1522 December 24. The Este dukes of Ferrara, too, had a specific procedure (*Ordinario*, note the similarity with *Ordo/Ordines*) for distributing clothes: see Guerzoni 1999, 370.

49 We know that Panigarola held the post of ducal *spenditore* (literally 'spender') with the specific aim of keeping the Sforza up to date with the Italian and European courtly trends. Barbieri 1938.

50 Santoro 1939, 42.

51 *Ibid.*, 41.

52 Lubkin 1994, 56. For a full overview of the hierarchy and roles of the *camerieri*, see 132-137.

53 *Ibid.*, 62, 146, 167-168, 214, 235, 322 n. 29.

54 *Ibid.*, 98.

bureaucratic office operated from above.

The second element that makes the passage significant regards the way in which, in some specific cases, the duke and the *camerieri* interacted with the financial branch of the chancery: strictly orally. Indeed, the *Informazioni* draw a very precise, almost 'scientific' opposition of written and oral communication in the chancery. Instead of suggesting a hierarchical distinction between 'high' scribal culture and 'low' orality, the *Informazioni* imply that each form of communication had its characteristics and usage.⁵⁵ Written communication was necessary for some aspects of governance, but could also become highly problematic because it functioned through material papers which could circulate outside the communication circuit first intended by their author. This undesired materiality of written communication is at the base of the 'counter-archival' practices that make historical research more complicated today: we have a fair share of the written evidence that was produced to be preserved; in addition, we can often get a sense of the written evidence that was produced to be later discarded, through its accidental survival; however, sources like the *Informazioni* remind us that we should also take into account that portion of communication that was specifically meant *not* to become evidence. Once more, it is possible to refer to Lubkin, who observes that 'the relations between Galeazzo and his *camerieri di camera* are difficult to trace fully through written evidence. Because these men stayed with the duke constantly, little of their interaction appeared in writing. Because their interaction was often of an intimate and personal nature, it was inappropriate or dangerous to record or discuss what had occurred.'⁵⁶

To sum up, the analysis of the practices of political communication as they emerge from the *Informazioni* demonstrates three important points. Firstly, the distance between decision- and document-making was often minimal—or even non-existent—in time as well as in space, thus debunking the representation of the chancery as an isolated and disciplined office that took orders from above following a clear hierarchy. Secondly, the chancery was subject to multiple different influences, as secretaries and clerks worked in direct, continuous and informal partnership with a wide range of outsiders, some of whom are not clearly identifiable (the counsellors) or by definition elusive (the *camerieri*). Thirdly, there was no clear-cut divide between a supposedly bureaucratic chancery culture and courtly culture: the presence of *camerieri* and the targeted use of orality for

55 Scholars are increasingly interested in studying the importance of speech and oral culture in the late medieval and early modern world. See for example Love 2002, VV. AA. 2002, Cohen and Twomey 2015, Walker and Kerr 2015, Degl'Innocenti, Richardson and Sbordoni 2016.

56 Lubkin 1994, 134.

Financial Chancery – Oral Communication Procedure for Donating Money

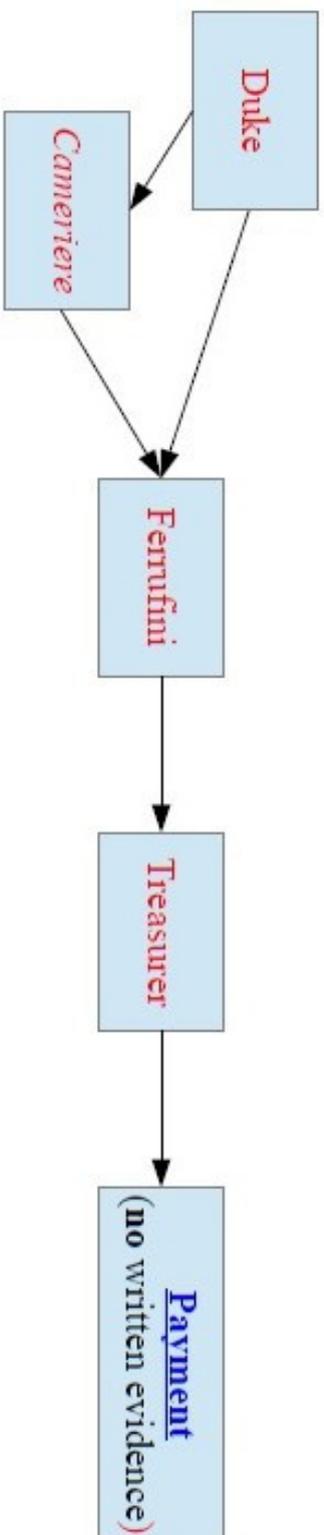


Fig. 3.5

conducting some specific kinds of businesses make it impossible to separate the chancery from the wider cultural environment in which it was enmeshed.

2.4. Chancery output: features of the expeditioni

Before concluding this section, it is worth focusing more specifically on the final phase of chancery activity: that of the *expeditione*, in which documents were physically made and sent. How did the framework of political practices outlined in the *Informazioni*—but also that of social practices transpiring from the *Ordines*—affect the nature and quality of document-making? I have singled out three key-features of the *expeditioni*.

The first is their potential extemporariness. Indeed, the fact that document-making could not always be clearly separated from decision-making determines that what we frame as 'the chancery' could in fact be nothing more than a secretary (or a clerk) assisting an influential outsider (like a counsellor or a well-connected petitioner) who, by force of practice, had the authority to use ducal wordpower. Given our presentist bias, we tend to automatically attach a strong 'institutional-ness' to official documents like those coming from a chancery; and yet, as we have seen, the creation of documents often resulted from unregulated processes.

From extemporariness derives another relevant feature of the *expeditioni*: their fragmentation. The *expeditioni* belonged to many different flows of chancery output, which— importantly—were often mutually independent from each other. All chancery documents are 'ducal' insofar as they bear the marks of authority of the Sforza; however, this does not necessarily mean that they can all be unproblematically ascribed to a single and well-identifiable Sforza authority headed by the duke. Regarding this point, I have drawn attention to the registers recording the meetings of the *Consiglio de Castello* (see above, pp. 112-113) in order to highlight the plurality and contradictoriness of chancery output. But also the author of the *Informazioni* explicitly acknowledges the existence of multiple flows of documentation, as he points out that

the *expeditioni* passed through [Calco's] hands, when his excellence the duke was in Milan; but finding himself outside [Milan] in his dominion, [the *expeditioni* passed through the hand] of those chancery clerks and secretaries who followed the duke's court; those secretaries were *messer* Giovanni Giacomo Ghilini and *messer* Agostino Calco, son of the said sir Bartolomeo, and some other clerks, designated to ride behind his excellence's court at all times.⁵⁷

From this description, we understand that there were two main poles of Sforza documentary production: one was a residential chancery in Milan, the other was an itinerant chancery that followed the duke.

⁵⁷ Santoro1939, 40.

The question of the itinerancy of part of the Sforza chancery leads to the third feature of the *expeditioni*: their 'spatiality'—that is, their being tightly related to the physical location where the chancery was to be found. Since the *expeditioni* nearly always depended on interaction, *being there* was essential to have them done, and/or to have them done in a certain way, setting in writing certain things. But seen from the perspective of the duke and the Sforza leadership, the opposite was also true: *moving away* with part of the chancery was a simple but effective way to control the all-too-easy physical accessibility to wordpower—an issue that the *Ordines* struggled to manage.

A very clear example of the strict relationship between documentation and location emerges from Este Ferrara. Marco Folin observes that duke Ercole d'Este and his chief secretary, every end of December, moved from Ferrara to a countryside residence in order to discuss and formalise the appointments of the salaried officers for the year to come. This allowed them to escape from the political pressures of the city. Folin points out that the secretary (and not Ercole) was the key-character in this process, and that chroniclers bitterly criticised Ercole's disinterest for the decisions made. This claim is part of Folin's general argument that the Este chancery accumulated a power of its own and was largely independent from the person of the duke.⁵⁸ It is an argument that we can extend to late-Sforza Milan.

Given the very complicated relationship between the Sforza and Milanese society, it is reasonable to imagine that the dukes knew *where* and *when* to move in order to carry out the more delicate *expeditioni*.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, I was unable to find cases in point like the one of Ferrara (neither for Francesco II nor for the Sforza in general,) but future scholarship should definitely consider this spatial and 'kinetic' side of document-making.

To conclude, it is evident that the combination of these three features of the *expeditioni* (extemporariness, fragmentation, spatiality) decisively undermines opposite principles of bureaucracy (like impersonality and neutrality) typically associated with the endeavour of making official documents. It will be useful to have this in mind when, in the third part of the thesis, I will carry out my material analysis of documentary evidence.

3. Cultural practices: the chancery beyond administration

As is clear from the analysis of the *Ordines* and the *Informazioni*, the evidence on social and political practices undertaken in the chancery is crucial to understand that the latter

⁵⁸ Folin 2004, 168.

⁵⁹ For the overall inability of the Sforza to establish a constructive relationship with Milan and its elites, see Chittolini 1990; on the same issue, fascinatingly seen from the point of view of architecture and urbanism in Milan, see Boucheron 1998.

was much more open and dynamic than its rigid structure and ideal representation imply. However, if we wish to further realise the extent to which the chancery was different from a neutral office, we can also step back from the narrow perspective of politics and administration and ask a different question: was the chancery a centre dealing *exclusively* with the making of official documents? Until now, we have somehow taken this for granted. But did the chancery also play other roles? In other words: was the chancery a hub of (broadly intended) cultural practices that ultimately extended its range of functions?

In the rest of this chapter, I will show that the Sforza chancery in general, and that of Francesco II in particular, in addition to being a political-administrative centre, had two crucial (and interconnected) sides: that of a self-standing community—that is, a socially-varied group of people that did not perceive itself only in function of a master, the duke, but marked its autonomous presence in the city of Milan; and that of a centre of scholarship. These sides were not optional, but truly essential to the medieval and early modern concept of chancery, so much so that they remained intact also in the critical context of the Sforza restoration.

3.1. The chancery as a community

In Chapter 1, I briefly mentioned a document testifying that an Augustinian friar, Girolamo Morone, acted as chancery chaplain. He managed the income of a chapel located in the Milanese church of San Gottardo in Corte starting from 13 July 1522. Since I was discussing chancery hierarchy, I limited myself to stress the role of Morone; but in looking for evidence of the extra-administrative role the chancery played in the city of Milan, it is the *place* and the *date* of the document that are very significant.

I have already observed (p. 78) that San Gottardo in Corte had long been the church most strictly connected to the Visconti-Sforza dynasty, as the lords of Milan kept their seat of government (chancery included) in the nearby *Corte dell'Arengo*; and that during the 1450s, chancery clerks swore their oath of allegiance in San Gottardo's sacristy. However, the existence of a 'chancery chapel' in San Gottardo as late as 1522—that is, around fifty years after the Sforza court had left the *Corte dell'Arengo* (mid-1470s) to relocate in the castle of Porta Giovia—clearly indicates that the bond between the chancery and the church was not dictated only by a practical physical proximity. In other words, the chancery did not remain bound to San Gottardo for mere spatial reasons, but because it elected the church as *its own* worship-place of reference. This choice is very

significant: it shows that the chancery and its members did not see themselves only in function of the authority they served; rather, they existed as a self-standing body with a proper identity and a community side, just like the many groups (clans, confraternities, guilds) which defined themselves through—and competed for—the occupation and maintenance of civic sacred spaces.⁶⁰ It is worth noticing, for example, that the right to physically access the main shrine of the cathedral (the *Duomo*) was the crucial element that helped define the very unstable concept of nobility in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Milan.⁶¹ The same chancery *Ordines* point in this 'community' direction, as they overtly define the chancery as *consortium*, a Latin term meaning 'society', or 'fellowship'.⁶² Furthermore, the date of 13 July 1522 comes very early in the Sforza restoration: the chaplain's appointment even precedes the earliest secretarial signatures I could find at the bottom of ducal letters close (August 1522, p. 185). This suggests how urgent the chancery considered its re-connection to a chapel—that is, its reintegration in the urban fabric of the city.

The strong link between the chancery and the city can be also grasped, somehow unexpectedly, through evidence on the social profile of the ushers—which also confirms how underrated their role has been (see p. 77). Indeed, between 1522 and 1524, Francesco II put pressure on two Milanese parishes (Sant'Andrea in Porta Nuova and San Lorenzo in Porta Ticinese) to appoint ushers (Agostino Gorgonzola and Giovanni Pietro Sacchi) as *Anziani* (Elders) of the parishes themselves.⁶³ Since we have two close instances of the same operation, it is possible to hypothesise that Francesco and his aides were interested in establishing such connection: they found it desirable to have people acting as Elders in the chancery ranks. What was the Elders' role? In the words of Evelyn Welch, Elders 'ensured the continuity of neighbourhood rituals: they rang the parish church bells and went from door to door to summon the parishioners when meetings were about to begin; they contributed to the dissemination of new laws, duties and temporary measures; they reported wrongdoers; they ensured medical and spiritual assistance for the ill, and so forth.'⁶⁴ Therefore, the ushers, the figures more practically entrusted with the *separation* of the chancery from the outside world as porters and warders, were clearly seen fit for an *highly sociable* role. More than excluding outsiders from the chancery, the

60 See Arcangeli and others 2015. For a later period, see also Garrioch 2004.

61 Besozzi, 1984; Del Tredici 2013, 279 onwards.

62 BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, l. 86.

63 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, c. 69, 1522 December 7; ASMi, *Registri delle missive*, 222, c. 47, 1524 June 10.

64 Welch 1995, 38-43.

ushers-Elders were evidently likely to bring the chancery in contact with the most basic levels of society. Indeed, they may have been *supposed* to establishing that contact. Once again, the 'secret' chancery functioned following principles that have little to do with secrecy.

Generally speaking, the chancery itself was a remarkably varied place, from a social and educational point of view. One sure sign of this situation is that the *Ordines* are bi-lingual: in Latin for learned (and therefore well-off) coadjutors, clerks and secretaries; in vernacular for ushers and mounted messengers (*cavallari*), who belonged to a lower social status. Another sign is the recommendation for ushers (also to be found in the *Ordines*) to treat their superiors reverently in order to avoid disputes.⁶⁵ However, from a social point of view, the most interesting aspect of the chancery was the potential clash between social and political-administrative hierarchies. Who was more important between a young noble clerk and a non-noble secretary? Marco Folin points out how 'the ducal [Este] chancery (...) during the fifteenth century, was the institution where the contrast between social milieu and actual political power was sharpest.'⁶⁶ A situation like this often jeopardised the peaceful functioning of the chancery, and existed also in fifteenth-century Milan: Nadia Covini has followed the conflict between Giovan Tommaso Piatti, a noble coadjutor, and Cristoforo Cambiagio, a non-noble clerk, who got in a fight for a question of precedence; Cambiagio argued that his 'handling [the lord's] secrets' made him superior to Piatti, who disagreed (brandishing a knife.)⁶⁷ In the case of the Sforza, geographic divides also had great weight: the Milanese tended to despise the non-Milanese, and the tension between Lombards and non-Lombards—the latter owing their presence to the cosmopolitan environment of the Sforza court—was often palpable.⁶⁸ The case of first secretary Cicco Simonetta is emblematic: from a geographical point of view, he was a total outsider, as he came from the southern-Italian region of Calabria; socially, he was of very humble origins, and was ennobled by duke Francesco I Sforza on the basis of his faithful service. Despite all this, he accumulated wealth and influence and had very little regard for locals; eventually, it was a distinctively Milanese party—led by Pietro Pusterla, his family being one of the oldest and noblest in the city—that asked and obtained Simonetta's execution from Ludovico Sforza in 1480.⁶⁹

65 BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, l. 92: 'Item che quando per li scriptori de cancellaria gli siano domandate le cose necessarie nella cancellaria et per lo scrivere, siano obedienti et presti quanto se conviene, et gli portano honore et reverentia come debito'.

66 Folin 2004, 159.

67 Covini 2002, 114-115.

68 *Ibid.*, 116-117.

69 Simonetta 2004, 131, 161-164.

The situation in the chancery at the time of Francesco II must have been different, more homogeneous and quieter than in the past. Indeed, as anticipated (p. 80), the downsizing of the chancery determined a cut in the number of coadjutors and clerks. Since this personnel typically had a notarial milieu, it is no coincidence that I could find only one notary-clerk between 1522 and 1535.⁷⁰ Detecting the social standing of the other chancery members is very difficult: on the one hand, we lack some basic biographic data necessary to pursue the task; on the other hand, as mentioned above, social distinction in Milan and its Duchy—for example, the division between noble and non-noble families—was not sanctioned juridically, and changed continuously.⁷¹ Despite these limitations, two elements are worth of attention. Firstly, secretaries and clerks are normally referred to as *Nobile* when they appear in the documentation.⁷² This epithet should not be taken at face value, but it nonetheless testifies that there was a sense of exclusivity in belonging to the chancery, which was semantically associated to nobility. In addition, the use of the title *Nobile* associated to a post—rather than to family or clan—anticipates a trend that in Milan would emerge in the second half of the sixteenth century.⁷³ Secondly, we know that the political branch of the secret chancery hosted at least two clerics.⁷⁴ This fact is unique in the framework of the Sforza chancery before Francesco II: the only clerics to be found in the chancery ranks usually acted as secretaries of the beneficial branch, as they dealt with religious matters. Perhaps Francesco thought that clerics, already equipped with their benefices, could weight less on ducal finances.

3.2. *The chancery as a centre of scholarship*

The chancery being a centre of writing, a fellowship of men skilled in politics and pen-in-hand, and an institution that functioned in tight contact with a wider courtly environment, the connection between chancery and scholarship is quite natural. This fact is well known to historiography: in 2002, for example, Douglas G. Biow has indicated the association

70 His name is Agostino Monti. He is to be found in a list of notaries active in Milan during the sixteenth century: ASMi, Inventory n. 12 (*Elenco dei Notai Attivi a Milano nel secolo XVI*), 47.

71 Del Tredici 2014.

72 For example secretary Giovanni Giacomo Ferrufini (ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 225, c. 25, 1531 August 28), clerk Paolo Verano (ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 222, ll. 40-41, 1524 June 5), clerk Gerolamo Bertone (ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 222, c. 71, 1524 August 6), clerk Giovanni Paolo de Scarli (ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, c. 181, 1525 April 29), clerk Evangelista Imperiale (ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 222, c. 139, 1525 April 6).

73 Del Tredici 2014.

74 On 29 November 1523, Francesco II urged the debtors of the Milanese parish of San Barnaba to pay their dues to the provost, Amico Taegio, who acted as secretary in the chancery (ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, ll. 53-54). On 5 June 1524, the chancery urged the managers of the San Matteo hospital of Pavia to let clerk Paolo Verano take possession of a chapel belonging to the same hospital (ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 222, l. 40).

between secretaries and humanism with great clarity, but many historians before him focused on single case studies to make the same claim.⁷⁵ In 1990, Robert-Henri Bautier wrote what is perhaps the most complete overview on the subject. He highlighted how chanceries propelled some of the most successful cultural trends throughout Europe from (at least) the twelfth century, to the heights of late-fourteenth- and early-fifteenth century Florence (with characters such as Coluccio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni, Niccolò Niccoli, Poggio Bracciolini), Rome (Enea Silvio Piccolomini) and Naples (Lorenzo Valla).⁷⁶

But besides these renowned centres, Bautier also devoted attention to golden-age Sforza Milan, stating that the Visconti-Sforza chancery constituted one of the most important northern-Italian *foyers* of culture.⁷⁷ The 'celebrity gallery' that follows is impressive: from the Visconti age, Bautier picks chancery clerks and secretaries like Pasquino de Capelli, Antonio Loschi, and Pier Candido Decembrio.⁷⁸ From the Sforza age, the selection includes both Cicco and Giovanni Simonetta, Bartolomeo and Tristano Calco. To this list of names, one may add some revealing definitions of the Sforza chancery surfacing from archival documents and epistolaries. In 1461 Francesco Tranchedini, son of the well known ambassador Nicodemo, enthusiastically defined the chancery as *musarum domum et Phoebi sacellum*, ('the home of the Muses and the shrine of Apollo').⁷⁹ The humanist Giorgio Valagussa wrote about the *ornatissima cancellaria* ('most prized chancery') as a place where it was possible to discuss philosophy, history and antiquity.⁸⁰

What happened to this long-lasting tradition after the end of the Sforza golden age? As usual, the interest of scholars suddenly stops with the year 1499. Yet, looking at a period of crisis represents an optimal vantage point to measure the solidity of a cultural legacy. Therefore, asking whether the Sforza chancery was still an active *foyer* of culture under Francesco II means testing if chancery and scholarship were actually inextricable.

To begin with, the idea of an *ornatissima* chancery as *musarum domum et Phoebi sacellum* certainly remained in the mind of Francesco II's *Gran Cancelliere* Girolamo Morone. Indeed, in a letter written to beneficial secretary (and humanist) Giacomo Antiquario before the fall of Ludovico Sforza, Morone wrote in elegant Latin that he 'ardently desire[d]' to join

75 Biow 2002, Gualdo 1990, Bentley 1987, Ryder 1976.

76 Bautier 1990.

77 *Ibid.*, 51.

78 Bueno de Mesquita 1975, Viti 2006, Id. 1987.

79 Sverzellati 1998, 504.

80 Simonetta 2004, 137.

‘that most elegant academy (*academia*) of scribes, also known as chancery clerks, who are experts of the most secret affairs of the prince. Such academy is famous for its style, [its members] usually spend even the nights listening, reading, discussing and writing. Such academy, besides showing incomparable erudition and excellence in any genre of oratory, avoids any vanity, moral weakness and swerve, [such academy] calls for adequate studies, virtuous actions and respectable habits.’⁸¹

Despite this remarkable rhetorical effort, there is no evidence to suggest that Antiquario hired Morone. Nevertheless, the apologetic description is extremely important because it unveils the ideal framework involving the Sforza chancery. If a reader knew nothing about such institution, s/he would hardly recognise its political nature, except for a vague reference to the management of the ‘secret affairs of the prince.’ Instead, Morone offers one straightforward definition, pointing in an opposite direction: ‘that most elegant academy (*academia*) of scribes.’ The key-word *academia* may be translated as 'school', but it is also a tribute to the humanistic academies flourishing in Italy at that time.⁸² Therefore, the chancery is seen as a place for scholars and their disciples, rather than a governmental office with decision makers and their functionaries, a site of learning and dialogue (like Plato's academy) rather than administration. More importantly, the chancery is a place where practitioners do not only learn a technical expertise, but also wider intellectual knowledge and moral values. Morone insists on this 'holistic' value of the chancery as he leaves the practice of writing last in a list that includes listening, reading, and discussing as integral parts of chancery activity. The focus on orality is reaffirmed shortly after, as Morone notes that secretaries and clerks, mastering oratory, are educated speakers—not just writers. Finally, it is worth noticing how Morone subtly plays with the word *literae*, which means both 'letter' (in the material sense of a letter) and 'knowledge.'⁸³

Knowing Morone's mindset certainly is relevant per se, but the point is also understanding whether his ideal matched reality at the time he became *Gran Cancelliere*. In other words, we have to check whether secretaries and clerks had biographies (and bibliographies) to suggest that the chancery still had an *academia* side under Francesco II. The answer to this question is absolutely in the affirmative. Four prominent secretaries active between 1522 and 1535 show a humanist profile. First secretary Bartolomeo Rozzoni, for example, cooperated with no less than Demetrio Calcondila—one of the most celebrated Greek intellectuals of the fifteenth century—in publishing classical

81 Promis and Müller 1863, 11 [my translation].

82 See Chambers and Quiviger 1995, and now Testa 2015.

83 See for example Sansovino 1568, s. v.: ‘Lettere (...) litere, missive & risponsive, che si mandano indietro & inanzi. Lettere per lo studio & la scienza usa il volgo.’

incunabula.⁸⁴ Camillo Ghilini translated in Latin an autobiographic memoir of Battista Fregoso, doge of Genoa between 1478 and 1483; his union of classical learning and political culture proved successful to the point that the book was soon to be found in Milanese libraries.⁸⁵ Amico Taegio took advantage of his status of diplomatic agent to nurture an international network that included the German jurist and humanist Christoph von Scheurl,⁸⁶ as well as Venetian and Neapolitan literates.⁸⁷ In addition, Taegio appears in the very popular novellas of Matteo Bandello (1480–1562) with the role of narrator, a clear sign of his fame in intellectual circles.⁸⁸ Finally, Galeazzo Capra, clerk until 1525 and secretary during the 1530s, authored an encomiastic book on women (*Della eccellenza et dignità delle donne*)⁸⁹ and one ambitious *Anthropologia*, i.e. a philosophical dialogue on human nature, divided in three books.⁹⁰

Furthermore, two chancery members (the same Capra and Agostino Parravicini) not only wielded their pens to write documents on behalf of the duke, but also to transmit a memory of the epochal events they witnessed—in line with chancellors-chroniclers elsewhere in late medieval Italy.⁹¹ Parravicini worked on a manuscript chronicle of Milan from 1499 to 1529, and was active in the chancery between the 1490s and 1525.⁹² Capra wrote an account of the facts involving Francesco II and the recapturing of the Duchy of Milan between 1522 and 1531. This book was so successful that it was printed in Milan, Venice, Nurnberg, Antwerp, and Valencia when Capra was still alive (he died in 1537.)⁹³ Capra's book, as the titles of the Venice editions suggest, belongs to the genre of the Renaissance *commentarii*. As Gary Ianziti remarked, this genre stood at the crossroads between historiography, information, and propaganda.⁹⁴ They were the chancery genre par excellence: the *commentarii* were written inside chanceries, by chancery members, because they had to be based on chancery materials to be authoritative.⁹⁵ But what is

84 Verga 1893, 14. On Calcondila, see Petrucci 1973.

85 Gazzini 2012, 283; Ghilini 1509. The book was successful and saw three more sixteenth-century editions, in Paris (Petrus Vidoue, 1518), Basel (Bartolomaeum Westhemerum, 1541) and Antwerp (Ioannem Bellerum, 1565). Paolo Giovio devoted an entry to Ghilini in his *Elogi degli uomini illustri* (Giovio 2006, 371-372).

86 Freiherrn von Soden and Knaake 1867, *ad indicem*.

87 Taegio is praised in the fifth chant of Antonino Lenio's poem *Oronte gigante* (1531).

88 Bandello 1992, *novella XXXI* (pp. 303-306).

89 Capra 1525.

90 Capra 1533.

91 For a general overview, see Dale, Williams Lewin, and Osheim 2009; see also Ianziti 2012; on the above-mentioned Coluccio Salutati, see Tanzini 2014; on Naples, see De Caprio 2012 On Milan: Ianziti 1981, Belloni, 1980.

92 Argelati 1743, vol. 2, col. 1038. Unfortunately, this manuscript seems to have disappeared.

93 Ricciardi 1976.

94 Ianziti 1983; Id. 1992. more generally, see also Id. 1988.

95 Ianziti 1983, 914.

important for my argument is that the production of *commentarii* in Francesco II's chancery constitutes a very strong sign of continuity with the 1450–1499 period. Indeed, Giovanni Simonetta's *Rerum gestarum Francisci Sfortiae commentarii*—dealing with the history of Francesco I Sforza and written between 1470 and 1476—had been one of the most important examples of the genre.⁹⁶

Therefore, the chancery of Francesco II maintained that role of 'foyer of culture' that Bautier acknowledged for the Visconti-Sforza age. This happened despite the ongoing major political crisis, which demonstrates that the status of centre of scholarship was indeed inherent in the chancery as a centre of writing. Between 1522 and 1535, the chancery may have been less attractive than the 'most elegant academy of scribes' that Morone enthusiastically described at the time of duke Ludovico. However, clerks and secretaries continued to alternate political tasks with literary efforts of various kind; or, like Parravicini and Capra, they engaged in scribal activities that went beyond the strict day-to-day work of the chancery, and aimed at leaving a long-lasting memory of what the Sforza loyalists had endured during the Italian Wars.

With the chancery as a community and as a centre of scholarship, I conclude the overview of chancery practices. In introducing Part II, I advanced the hypothesis that shifting the focus from rigid structures to fluid practices could contribute to problematise our notion of chancery. Let us now recap what groups of practices I have identified, and how they enrich our perspective on chancery functioning.

Firstly, an against-the-grain reading of the *Ordines* has demonstrated that the purported isolation, secrecy and sacredness of the chancery clashed with deeply-rooted social practices that in reality physically opened the chancery to outsiders. Unskilled *garzoni* informally assisting secretaries and clerks, characters who were 'worth of reputation' or 'familiar' to the chancery, casual strangers (not only notables, but also 'plebeians:') a remarkably wide range of people could tamper with chancery activities. Very importantly, some outsiders were given the chance to hold the quill and write, thus replacing official chancery members. The signatures *advenam* ('stranger') to be found on chancery registers testify that such practice was broadly accepted.

Secondly, the memoir *Informazioni sulle incombenze dei segretari ducali* draws attention to the fact that the chancery, far from being merely a secluded scriptorium formalising decisions taken elsewhere (in time and space,) was constantly involved in

⁹⁶ Ianziti 1981.

political practices related to information management and communication. Secretaries were often the first to deal with sensitive information, and decided whether or not to communicate it (and to whom.) Chancery members followed processes of decision-making closely, and they regularly—though very informally—worked in direct contact with elusive figures (the 'counsellors,' the *camerieri*) whose authority was tied to very volatile relations of power. As we have seen, orality and the need *not* to leave written evidence marked some specific parts of the chancery's activity. In light of all these dynamics, I have singled out three recurrent non-bureaucratic features of the *expeditioni*: extemporariness, fragmentation, and 'spatiality'—i.e. their being strongly related to the physical location of the chancery.

Finally, as we have seen in the last two sub-sections, the chancery was a hub for broader cultural practices—the privileged connection with a chapel in the heart of Milan, the cult of classical antiquity, the writing of literature and of history. According to the *Ordines* and *Gran Cancelliere* Girolamo Morone, the chancery was also a socially-varied *consortium* (fellowship) and an *academia* (academy). We must take this variety of functions into due account if the aim is achieving a reliable picture of the chancery.

These three sets of practices, diverse as they are, have one crucial thing in common: they all contradict the oversimplistic notion of the chancery as an inert instrument at the disposal of a reified (or restricted) authority. To the contrary, they show that the chancery functioned as an open platform of integration. The heart of Sforza wordpower, beyond its most ideal representation, was propelled by exchange and by social, political and cultural interaction.

Chapter 4 – The Practice of Centre-Periphery Correspondence

In a 2011 essay, Franca Leverotti defined the Sforza chancery in the fifteenth century as ‘structure, filter, transmission belt between the duke and his officials, the duke and his subjects.’⁹⁷ In light of the findings so far, it is safe to say that such a strictly top-down definition is incomplete and limiting. Nevertheless, at its most basic level, the chancery did act as a transmission belt producing and deploying the duke's wordpower from the centre to the peripheries of his dominion. What was the chancery's function in such case? What was the aim of the letters it sent?

At first, these questions may sound trivial: the chancery was a tool for administration, and the letters it produced carried messages, orders, and requests, thus making governance possible. However, having problematised the notion of chancery through the analysis of the practices that were undertaken within it, we should also assess if and to what extent the exercise of wordpower—the act of deploying chancery documents around the territory of the Duchy—can be considered in itself a practice: a *meaningful* performance rather than a neutral and logistical endeavour only. In recent years, scholarship has started to adopt this perspective. For example Jean Boutier, Sandro Landi and Olivier Rouchon have highlighted the need of considering correspondences not only as carriers of information, but also as interesting objects of study in virtue of their internal mechanisms.⁹⁸ In the field of Visconti-Sforza studies, Massimo Della Misericordia has argued that historians should not take the ‘dialogue’ between ‘the prince and the social and territorial bodies’ only as an abstract relationship, but also as a significantly concrete interaction based on the exchange of writings; the latter should constitute ‘a new and specific interest for research on the territorial state.’⁹⁹

The most complete sources for studying the relationship between Francesco II and his dominion are the *Registri delle Missive*. As noted in the general introduction (pp. 41-42), they record the transcriptions of the letters travelling from the centre of Sforza power to officers, communities and individual subjects all around the Duchy. Scholars typically have an 'extractive' attitude toward the *Registri delle Missive*—that is, they use them to draw useful bits of historical data. I have repeatedly used the registers in this way too, for example for unveiling the political-economic relationships between chancery members

97 Leverotti 2011, 43: ‘struttura, filtro, cinghia di trasmissione, tramite il duca e i suoi ufficiali, e tra il duca e la popolazione.’

98 Boutier, Landi, and Rouchon 2008, 7-8.

99 Della Misericordia 2004, 148 [my translation].

and the duke (pp. 74-76).¹⁰⁰ However, what has yet to be conducted is a broad critique of the *Registri delle Missive* as evidence of how and with what ends, ambitions and limits the chancery deployed ducal documents. Can a comprehensive analysis of the *Registri delle Missive* help us reach a different and compelling perspective on the exercise of wordpower? The answer to this question can be obtained from the combination of four different (though mutually connected) series of considerations, which I order from the more speculative to the more substantial.

The first series of considerations regards the organisation and composition of the *Registri delle Missive*. I will argue that the registers not only served an administrative function—recording outgoing letters and making them available for future reference—but also a representational one; they were objects, documents/monuments materialising the idea that the Sforza actually controlled their dominion.

The second series of considerations regards the language of the registers' entries (and therefore the language of ducal letters themselves.) I will highlight that such language, far from being only pragmatic, relentlessly aimed at projecting the image of the duke's unchallenged authority, even when—as I will show—the circumstances clearly betrayed the duke's powerlessness. As a consequence, I will assert that the primary objective of the correspondence flowing from the centre to the periphery was not necessarily an effective exercise of governance, but a means to establish a minimum (rhetorical) degree of jurisdiction.

This last claim leads to the third series of considerations, which regards a peculiar trait of politics by correspondence as it emerges from the language used in the registers: the difference between 'accepting' (*acceptare*) and 'obeying' (*obedire*) or 'executing' (*exequire*) orders coming from the Sforza authorities. I will maintain that such difference—inconceivable in today's political culture—further demonstrates that the act of spreading the ducal written word had its own self-contained significance.

Finally, to make the last series of considerations, I will look at another source: a general Sforza balance sheet of the year 1525 showing in detail what expenses Francesco II sustained for ruling. As we shall see, wordpower-related expenses are among the highest. Considering how inefficient Sforza correspondence was, I will be able to affirm that Francesco invested great amounts of money for staging the performance of document delivery, rather than for obtaining concrete political results out of the performance itself.

In light of all this, my conclusion will be that the deployment of chancery

¹⁰⁰ For the opposition between an 'extractive' and an 'ethnographic' (i.e. more comprehensive) attitude to archival series, see Stoler 2002, 90.

documents around the Duchy of Milan, well before being a strictly functional administrative technique, was first and foremost a practice essential for making power visible. It is important to bear this representational side of wordpower in mind for the material analysis of chancery documents that will characterise Part III.

1. The *Registri delle Missive* beyond their administrative function

Since this chapter is largely based on the analysis of the *Registri delle Missive*, it is appropriate to start by describing their organisation. In dealing with the evolution of the chancery of Francesco II (p. 60), I have already mentioned that outgoing letters were transcribed in two parallel series of registers during the years 1522–1525, before being united in one single series from 1531 onwards.

Let us focus on the 1522–1525 period then, the most ambitious of Francesco II's history as duke. Letters were transcribed in one or the other series of registers depending on destination. One series gathers letters (*Registri delle Missive* n. 220, n. 222, and n. 223) to Milan, Como, the Gera d'Adda, Lodi, and Pavia; the other series (of which only register n. 221 has survived) gathers letters to Cremona, Novara, Tortona, Alessandria, and Asti. If these towns are located on a map (as seen in fig. 4.1, p. 131) the rationale of the division immediately becomes clear. The series divide the Sforza dominion in two well-defined regions: one includes Milan and the northern, eastern, and southern parts of the dominion, the other includes its western and south-western parts. There is only one, evident exception to this scheme: the town of Cremona, despite being located in the South-East of the Duchy, is in the group of western and south-western towns. After Milan, Cremona was the most important town of the Duchy, and it is likely that the chancery found it potentially confusing to record the affairs relating to both centres in the same series of registers.¹⁰¹

This last choice certainly is a sign of the administrative function of the *Registri delle Missive*, which served to track past contacts with officers, communities and subjects belonging to specific areas. But was functionality the registers' *sole* raison d'être? The registers are archives of letters and, as Randolph Head puts it, pre-modern archives not only worked on the functional level, but also on the conceptual and on the symbolic/representational. On the conceptual level, archival sources represent 'the dominant power's self-interpretation and self-mirroring.' On the symbolic/representational level, archives as material objects can materially 'stand for

101 For Cremona as the second most important town of the Duchy, see Chittolini 1982, 40; Barbierato 2006, 58.



Fig. 4.1: Map of the Duchy of Milan with the names of its main towns and areas. Letters to the towns/areas with their names underlined (Milan, Como, Gera D'Adda, Lodi, Pavia) are transcribed in one series of the *Registri delle Missive* (nn. 220, 222, 223); letters to the other towns (Novara, Tortona, Alessandria, Asti) are transcribed in another series (register n. 221)

their politics for the power of their rulers.¹⁰² Can we see the composition of the *Registri delle Missive*—and the activity that necessarily preceded it, i.e. the production and delivery of ducal letters—as important conceptual and symbolic/representational practices, instead of as strictly functional ones only? My answer is in the affirmative, for at least two reasons.

Firstly, we have already seen that in March 1531, as soon as Francesco II understood that his five-year exile was finally coming to an end, one of his first decisions was to re-order what he affectionately defined as ‘old little archive’ (*il solito et vecchio Archivietto*, p. 57). In other words, Francesco overtly attached a symbolic value to record-keeping, which represented legitimacy and long-craved stability.

Secondly, and more specifically, it can be argued that the *Registri delle Missive* are more than just the sum of the letters they contain: they have their own ‘monumentality.’ The registers physically bind together the day-to-day work of the chancery, and serialise it in voluminous books. In so doing, they automatically tend to look perfectly linear. They obliterate the accidents, idiosyncrasies and any breakdown in dialogue between the Sforza leadership and its subjects, thus rendering an overall sense of control. We can imagine that owning registers recording the political-administrative relationship with a given territory lent an objectified (and therefore very strong) support to the claim of owning that territory itself. When Francesco II took power in 1522, there were probably no less than 150 copybooks materially signifying that his forebears had ruled on the dominion he was inheriting.¹⁰³ In this perspective, it seems clear that keeping registers up-to-date and adding new ones to the series not only was a pragmatic matter of administration, but also a highly symbolic practice of authority.

2. The 'language of governance' of the *Registri delle Missive*

Another characteristic that contributes significantly to the monumentality of the *Registri delle Missive* is their language. Reading the registers serially means realising that the chancery relentlessly used the same, solemn tone for addressing its interlocutors. As the case may be, such solemn tone propounds the duke's authoritativeness, resoluteness, magnanimity, paternalism; reproduced in hundreds and hundreds of entries, it clearly

102 Head 2003, 749-751.

103 *GGAS*, vol. 2, 928-929. Today, the registers belonging to the *Registri delle Missive* are 252 in total, but the series has come to incorporate many registers that are not chancery copybooks at all (for example copybooks originally belonging to ambassadors, three personal journals of Cicco Simonetta, the reports of the meetings of the *Consiglio de Castello* I have analysed in Chapter 3.) The general inventory of Milan's State Archives counts 187 registers actually gathering the transcriptions of outgoing chancery letters. Hence, my estimate of 150 chancery copybooks is conservative.

casts the idea of a deep territorial control on the part of the duke and the Sforza leadership.

However, we should be careful not to accept the tone of ducal letters at face value. Indeed, the language used in the dialogue between the Sforza authorities and their subjects did not always mirror the actual relations of power between them. On the one hand, as Nadia Covini puts it, those who wrote to the duke adopted a standard ‘language of obedience and submission:’ a language that, while simulating deference, can also (and more subtly) express ‘resistance, defiance, tensions.’¹⁰⁴ on the other, I would consequently add, Francesco II and the chancery adopted a symmetrical ‘language of governance:’ one that, while maintaining a standard degree of authoritativeness, can also betray anxieties and a certain powerlessness.

The use of the language of governance appears to have been almost unconditional: the chancery's solemn tone remained undeterred even when—at a closer examination—the circumstances evidently show that Francesco II was completely unable to impose his authority on subject officers and communities. To give an idea of the striking mismatch between rhetoric and reality transpiring from some letters, I have selected three cases coming directly from the *Registri delle Missive* and involving the town of Novara and the villages of Bassignana and Cannobio (fig. 4.2, p. 134).

Novara is a town 70 kilometres west of Milan. Strategically positioned between the Sesia and the Ticino rivers, throughout the Italian Wars it was among the first landmarks to be targeted any time the French wished to penetrate in the Duchy. As a consequence, the French repeatedly brought and abandoned their goods there during their occupations and sudden retreats. Francesco II and his aides knew it, and wished to get hold of that patrimony; in order to do so, they had some proclamations published urging the population to notify any ‘gold, silver, and stuff of the French,’ with the promise of a punishment for those who refused. On 6 July 1524, however, the secret chancery wrote to the *Commissario delle Tasse* ('Tax Commissary') of Novara, stating that the duke decided to concede three extra days to denounce the money and the goods of the French. Behind this decision, it is clearly possible to speculate on the existence of a form of resistance: few people (or nobody) in Novara wanted to hand over those assets; if not due to actual anti-Sforza feeling, at least because the population knew that the French might come back soon.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the duke had to insist. The letter reads:

104 Covini 2008, 21.

105 Regime changes in Novara were so common between 1521 and 1525, that the Sforza happened to invite the whole community to change side and welcome the French, in order to avoid bloodshed.



Fig. 4.2: Map of the Duchy of Milan with the town of Novara and the villages of Cannobbio and Bassignana

Even though we should have reasonably allowed to be punished those who did not notify the gold, the silver and the things of the French, and other enemies of ours, by the time and in the modes the proclamations disposed in that city; nevertheless, *because we want it to happen more peacefully*, we say that we are happy to issue a proclamation that extends for three days the orders contained in the previous ones (...) and we order that you proceed against the disobedient without any pardoning (...).¹⁰⁶

In this case, the language of governance aimed at turning Francesco II's manifest powerlessness into a form of leniency. Since the first proclamation had been ignored, the chancery wrote that Francesco was extending the deadline for the hand-over of the goods of the French with the aim of avoiding unnecessary disturbance. It is highly unlikely that a three-day postponement of the hand-over would have changed the situation. Nevertheless, Francesco remained quiet: the *Commissario delle Tasse* seems to have at least correctly published the proclamations.

Things were different—and I come to the second example—when peripheral officers directly refused to mediate between the Sforza leadership and the community they oversaw. This represented a more serious, institutionalised level of resistance requiring a much firmer answer. Yet, once again, the language of governance foresaw a controlled approach: subtly intimating, but also implying a sense of authority—the same authority that the centre was evidently lacking. On 21 September 1524, the chancery wrote to the *Pretore* of Bassignana—a little village near Alessandria, on the right bank of the Po river (an area known as Oltrepò):

We are warned by sir Giovanni de Cani, our *Commissario contra Rebelli* [Commissary against the Rebels] in the Oltrepò, that you do not want either to publish his proclamations, or to do anything about this business [the chasing of rebels to the Sforza], as if our interest was not at stake here; we dislike [to hear] this, and therefore we say to you, that under the threat of our disgrace, you shall not only publish the proclamations, and share the intelligence and the clues that you will gather, in any way, against the said Rebels or suspects, *even if they come from Bassignana*, but [you shall] also do what the said *Commissario* will research you to do; and should you fail to deliver, we will react in such way, that you will be sorry.¹⁰⁷

Failure to publish proclamations had legal implications, because laws were valid only if made public. In Venice and its Terraferma, for example, impeding the publication of proclamations was a common expedient to avoid the observance of orders coming from the government. Actually, such expedient was considered so juridically effective that the Venetian government itself adopted it in 1606, when it materially forbade the

106 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 132, 1524 June 6 [emphasis added]: for the full transcription of this document, see the Appendix 1 section, document n. 1.

107 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 162, 1524 September 21 [emphasis added]: for the full transcription of this document, see the Appendix 1 section, document n. 2.

publication of Pope Paul V's Interdict in the attempt to avoid its effects.¹⁰⁸ In our case here, the problem was that the Sforza *Preto* was more loyal to locals than to the authority who had appointed him to his post. The letter itself suggests it: the fact that the rebels came from Bassignana should not have stopped the *Preto* from denouncing them. Despite this open infidelity, the chancery only menaced consequences, instead of taking action directly. The question was tackled rhetorically, but in practice Francesco II and the Sforza leadership acknowledged all their limits.

The last example I wish to present is the one that better reveals the distance that could exist between rhetoric and reality; and, at the same time, it shows very well the complex relationship between Francesco II, his peripheral officers, and subject communities. The chancery wrote two letters: the first to Anchise Visconti (13 May 1524), the *Governatore* of lake Maggiore, and the second to 'the Commune and the men' of Cannobio (24 May 1524), a village lying on the northern bank of the same lake.¹⁰⁹ Both the major lakes north of Milan, lake Maggiore and lake Como, together with the isolated valleys around them, were among the most uncontrollable areas of the Duchy; in addition, they were under constant political and military pressure as they bordered with the Swiss Cantons. For these reasons, the representatives of ducal power tended to rule independently, and the tension with the central authorities was often high.

In the first letter, the duke informed Anchise Visconti that the men of Cannobio had sent some agents to Milan to testify their loyalty to the Sforza; the agents said that any previous demonstration of favour towards the French and their supporters had been staged only forcedly, whereas the good disposition of Cannobio towards the duke had never been in question. But this fact notwithstanding, the agents complained that Visconti threatened the village, as he announced that he would have soon sent an army to punish its population. This situation throws light on the unsolvable ambiguities in the relationship between centre and periphery: could the Sforza leadership ever be sure of the side Cannobio actually chose during the war with the French? The chancery probably lacked information, and—as in any community—it was likely that there was a pro-Sforza and a pro-French faction, although the division had to do with local contrasts more than

108 De Vivo 2012, 268-272. An Interdict is an ecclesiastical censure that prohibits the performance of certain rites in a given city or area.

109 The chancery had a vast (and sometimes vague) vocabulary to identify the subject communities and their representatives. Villages—or group of villages, variously grouped in 'lands' (*terre*,) 'parishes' (*parrocchie* and *pievi*,) 'valleys' (*valli*)—were administrated by the 'Commune' (*comune*,) the 'Consuls' (*consuli*,) and the 'men' (*homini*,) For example, in ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 222, l. 68, 1524 June 27, the chancery described the interlocutors in the periphery as 'our officials, and the Consuls, Communes, and men of the dominion.'

with large-scale politics. And why was the *Governatore* so determined to use force? Was he acting on behalf of his superior, Francesco II, or pursuing his own personal ambitions? We know the answer to this last question: later in the registers, it emerges that Anchise Visconti would soon make himself an anti-Sforza rebel.¹¹⁰ But, for the moment, the duke asked him to refrain from any violence, and ordered that every ‘land and valley’ under the control of the *Governatore* should send four of their ‘most prominent members’ (*primati*) to Milan to swear an oath of fidelity. This was a political act, but the impression is also that the Sforza wanted to survey an area of which little was known at court.

Was the duke's order executed? The *Registri delle Missive* only record a meeting with the *primati* of Cannobio, and this suggests that the majority of the communities around lake Maggiore ignored the summoning, and that Visconti certainly was not zealous in his role as designated mediator. Yet, the description of the only meeting that took place is very interesting. It is appropriate to report some passages of the letter that the chancery sent to Cannobio:

We were very surprised, that you [the Commune and the men of Cannobio] have sent us agents so unwilling to reach an agreement and to aid us for this urgent need of ours, even though our intention is to give the money back; and eventually, *because of our goodness and clemency*, we have come to terms with their [the agents'] obstination, so that, even though we hoped to have an aid of at least 1,000 ducats from you, we settled for 500 (...) you have your receipt (...) so that you will undoubtedly have your money back. *Our good disposition towards you made us satisfied with the said amount*; in the same way, with good cheer, we accepted the oath of fidelity sworn by your ambassadors (...) and even though necessity forced you to stage some manifestation in favour of our enemies and rebels, your souls did not abandon the loyalty and devotion for us, and we exhort you to persist, because you will find that we will always be a good and just prince for you.¹¹¹

Therefore, the aim of summoning the communities of lake Maggiore was not only to establish a new *status quo* in the area through the swearing of a series of oaths of fidelity. Rather, as testified by the structure of the last letter, the duke had attracted his subjects to court also to extort a sum of money and to satisfy his urgent financial needs. However, once in Milan, the ambassadors of Cannobio were able to resist the pressure, and bargained on the amount of their loan. Here, even the use of the language of governance could hardly hide the embarrassment. Francesco II asked for one thousand ducats, but all he could obtain was five hundred. Therefore, it was written that he had mercifully accepted that sum, out of his goodness and clemency. Only after the business was settled, the oath of fidelity was sworn, and Francesco could welcome again Cannobio

110 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, ll. 197-198, 1525 May 13: a letter to the *Pretore* of Pallanza mentions ‘Anchise Visconti, who has now rebelled against us.’

111 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 121-122, 1524 May 24 [emphasis added]: for the full transcription of this document, see the Appendix 1 section, document n. 3.

under his protection. The ambassadors accepted the role-play, but carefully managed to bring home a written receipt of the loan, to keep it in their records and claim the money back in the future.

Let us now step back from these examples and return to the main question of the chapter: what was the primary function of Sforza wordpower, if seen in the light of the relentless and unconditional use of the language of governance? It seems clear that on many occasions, the act of delivering letters in the peripheries of the Duchy of Milan was not *a means to* convey messages or negotiate: the act was *the message*, and often the *only* statement of authority Francesco II was able to accomplish to establish a minimum degree of jurisdiction. Making such statement in a language of governance projecting, simulating power was all the chancery could do.

To better understand this argument, we should try to imagine the act of delivering letters in practice: a Sforza envoy—as we shall soon see, usually a mounted messenger—would have physically had access to a given area of the Duchy; he would have met a Sforza officer, or a prominent member of the community that he had reached; he would have given the officer (or the prominent member of the community) an object, a letter carrying the language of governance; he would have come back to the Sforza court, unharmed, after crossing other areas of the Duchy. Even assuming that the subjects would simply ignore the letter, does not this chain of events evidently represent an act of authority? Depending on the immediate circumstances, the Sforza leadership could have made more or less (or nothing) out of its formal control of a subject town or territory: whatever the case, keeping continuous contact with a subject town or territory was the most basic way to make present or future relations possible. In this context, the undeterred use of the language of governance had its own logic. It laid the rhetoric groundwork for domination, and—to connect these remarks with those I made in the previous section—it also gave an important contribution to the symbolic/representational side of the *Registri delle Missive*.¹¹²

The fact that the delivery of an order was considered at least as important as (if not more important than) its observance is further suggested by the very different treatment that Francesco II reserved to the *Commissario delle Tasse* of Novara and the *Pretore* of Bassignana in the examples discussed above. On the one hand, the *Commissario delle Tasse*, who appears to have duly published a proclamation, was treated

112 The notion that the written word had a very concrete creative potential in pre-modern Europe is widely accepted in historiography. For Italy, see Gamberini, Genet, and Zorzi 2011, Francesconi 2011, Lazzarini 2011. For other areas of Europe, see Watts 2009, 376-425; Britnell 2007.

with indulgence, even though the proclamation was ignored by the population of Novara. On the other hand, the *Pretore* of Bassignana was severely scolded because he refused to publish proclamations. However, another and more compelling element signals the utmost importance of the act of delivering ducal letters.

3. The difference between 'accepting' and 'obeying' or 'executing' a ducal letter

A number of entries of the *Registri delle Missive* make a peculiar distinction with regard to the reception of the letters they sent. Apparently, they could tolerate subjects ignoring their orders; by contrast, they did not tolerate subjects rejecting the letters containing the orders themselves—even less so if subjects gave clear signs of confrontation at the moment of the message's refusal. The chancery had a vocabulary to define such distinction: letters first and foremost had to be 'accepted' (*acceptare*), and then, possibly—but not necessarily—'obeyed' (*obedire*) or 'executed' (*exequire*).

As it is evident, the distinction between accepting and obeying or executing an order does not make sense in contemporary political-administrative culture: today, directives from the authorities are either executed or not executed; 'accepting' them avoiding execution does not constitute an admissible choice: it equals *non-execution* (for example in the case of the payment of a bill or a fine.) Therefore, I think that the distinction between accepting and obeying/executing ducal letters strongly reinforces the argument that the spread of wordpower in itself was a statement of authority, a practice meaningful in itself. Let us display and discuss some significant documentary evidence with three examples involving the villages of Bascapè (25 kilometres to the South-East of Milan), Casalbeltrame (15 kilometres to the West of Novara) and Rosate (25 kilometres to the South-West of Milan) (fig. 4.3, p. 140).

In the first case, on 29 December 1523, Francesco II wrote to two important men-at-arms of his, Sforzino Sforza (his cousin) and Paolo Lonato (a prominent Sforza officer, later appointed as castellan of Cremona) who were fighting the French, then still raiding the Duchy:

the day before yesterday, our *Magnifico Supremo Cancellario* wrote on our behalf, that you should have not molested the village of Bascapè, because it is so close to Melegnano, where our enemies [the French] find themselves, that, if they [the inhabitants of Bascapè] paid their contribution [to the Sforza party], [the French] could attack them sacking or burning the village (...). Now, we understand that you *not only* did disobey the said letter, but have kept the messengers that brought it to you. This has caused us a great sorrow; therefore, we order that as soon as you receive the present letter, you release the two messengers (...) and that you won't let anyone molest the said village of Bascapè (...).¹¹³

113 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 71-72, 1523 December 29 [emphasis added]: for the full



Fig. 4.3: Map of the Duchy of Milan with the town of Novara and the villages of Casalbeltrame, Rosate, and Bescapè

transcription of this document, see the Appendix 1 section, document n. 4.

There are two elements worth highlighting here. Firstly, in writing that his men-at-arms 'not only' disobeyed the orders, but also kept the messengers who brought them, Francesco II is suggesting that the dismissal of the first letter was an affront as much as the simple disobedience to orders. Secondly, the men-at-arms kept Francesco's messengers as a sign of provocation, which implies that they considered the sending of messengers as an act of authority that they could effectively counter.

One may object that the episode of Bascapé took place in a war zone, and is therefore to be considered exceptional. The second case, however, happened in times of peace, and nevertheless shows similar dynamics. On 2 August 1525, the chancery wrote to the vice-*Referendario* of Novara, who was having a dispute with the village of Casalbeltrame:

The agents of the community of Casalbeltrame referred to us that, after they presented to you a letter of our *Magnifico Gran Cancellero*, you have *not only* refused to execute the said letter, but you have jailed the one who brought the letter to you; this is so daring of you, that we are very much surprised (...).¹¹⁴

We do not know the object of the dispute, but it is possible to imagine that the agents of Casalbeltrame went to the Sforza court to complain about the vexations (probably of financial nature) of the vice-*Referendario*, and obtained a favourable response from Girolamo Morone. Morone personally wrote a letter in defence of the community of Casalbeltrame, and Casalbeltrame then forwarded the message to the vice-*Referendario*, who clearly signalled his disagreement by jailing the messenger. The reaction of the Sforza leadership is revealing: the chancery scolded the officer without even mentioning the circumstances that antagonised him to Casalbeltrame. Rather, the infraction consisted in having dismissed Morone's letter *overtly*: the problem was not the dismissal per se, but the dismissal being blatant. In this case, when the letter says that the vice-*Referendario* 'not only' refused to obey Morone's order, but dared to jail the messenger, it seems to indicate that the non-execution of the order could have been a viable option, as long as the order was received quietly. By contrast, challenging the authority of the Sforza leadership to deliver messages successfully required an immediate reaction.

Finally, the third case is the most significant, because it clearly connects the delivery of letters with a statement of authority. The letter in question was not transcribed in the *Registri delle Missive*, but in a register later labelled as 'Miscellaneous' and

114 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221 ll. 248-249, 1525 August 2: 'Li agenti per la comunita de Casalebeltramo ni hano exposto che havendovi presentato lettere dil Magnifico nostro Gran Cancellero *non solo* non haveti voluto exequire dicte lettere, ma haveti facto incarcerare quello che vi presentoe dicte lettere, cosa qual ni ha dato grande admiratione che da voi sii tanto ardito (...).' [emphasis added]

belonging to the years of Francesco II's exile. On 29 September 1527, the chancery wrote to the canons and the Chapter of the church of Santo Stefano in Rosate to urge the appointment of one Giovanni Antonio Rozzoni as provost. The appointment had already been agreed, but did not take place, because

being that land of ours in the power of the French, you *not only refused to make such election, but also to accept our letter, for the fear of them enemies*; but you promised that you would not have missed the chance to satisfy our will, once that the said land would have returned under our control (...) now that we understand, with not small sorrow, that you have made another election; we thought it was right to exhort you to revoke it with this present letter of ours (...).¹¹⁵

Giovanni Antonio Rozzoni was the nephew of Bartolomeo Rozzoni, the head of the political chancery; it is for this reason that the Sforza leadership requested Giovanni Antonio's election so decisively.¹¹⁶ Yet the canons and the Chapter of Rosate 'not only' avoided to make the election, but also refused to accept the letter from Francesco II. Indeed, the French controlled Rosate, and the clerics were apparently sure that being found in possession of fresh Sforza letters could have been dangerous. Therefore, the sole fact of receiving and keeping paperwork from a given authority was seen as a compromising sign of allegiance. If we see this fact from the opposite perspective, that of the authority—Francesco II—we can investigate the manifest connection between the simple act of delivering of letters and the creation of a space of jurisdiction.

To conclude, it is important to mention that the distinction between accepting and obeying/executing letters coming from the authorities was in force also elsewhere in Europe. Arndt Brendecke has shown that in late medieval and early modern Spain the simple reception of an order was defined with the verb *obedezer* (literally 'to obey,' in this context 'to acknowledge'), whereas its actual execution was defined with the verb *cumplir* ('fulfilling'). Officially, the distinction existed because peripheral officers of the Spanish king should have been able to only acknowledging orders, before actually fulfilling them once (and if) they had verified that the orders were compatible with local legislation. In practice, however, the same peripheral officers took advantage of the distinction between *obedezer* and *cumplir* to enact forms of resistance to the central authorities without risking open confrontation.¹¹⁷ The case of early-sixteenth-century Milan is absolutely analogous. Through the distinction between accepting and obeying/executing letters, the duke and his chancery created a convenient middle-ground that allowed them to impose a

115 ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 141, l. 18, 1527 September 28 [emphasis added]: for the full transcription of this document, see the Appendix 1 section, document n. 5.

116 Federico Del Tredici has pointed out how the parish of Rosate traditionally hosted some strongly pro-Sforza canons, together with other centres (Gorgonzola, Decimo, Segrate.) Del Tredici, 2012, 56.

117 Brendecke 2012, 118-121.

minimum (though fundamental) degree of jurisdiction by simply delivering letters around the Duchy. This is ultimately why the spread of wordpower, before being a functional instrument enabling negotiation and coercion, was a practice of authority with its own significance. more generally, it is worth mentioning that a strand of studies on late medieval and early modern Venice has focused on the weakness of the central authorities' control over the peripheries of the Terraferma.¹¹⁸

4. The cost of wordpower: a Sforza balance sheet of 1525

A further and final proof that the distribution of documents around the Sforza dominion was an important practice is the great economic investment Francesco II made on the documents' production and delivery. Indeed, even though—as we have seen in the previous sections—the epistolary contacts with the peripheries were often much more symbolic than politically and administratively efficient, Francesco did not hesitate to fund them abundantly. If we take into account his permanent financial precariousness, we realise how essential he considered the act of 'flooding' the Duchy of Milan with his written word.

The figures relating to Francesco II's investment in wordpower are to be found in a balance sheet entitled 'Summary of all the expense for the ducal dominion of Milan,' transcribed in register n. 26 of the *Registri Ducali*; the last line of the document, stating the total cost of governing the Duchy of Milan—312,509 *lire*, henceforward *l*—makes it clear that the expense is that for 'the whole year 1525.'¹¹⁹ It is not clear whether the figures represent a budget plan for the upcoming year or the final balance for the ending year—the first option is more plausible, because Francesco finished the year 1525 besieged in the castle of Porta Giovia—but this is irrelevant to my analysis. What is important is that the balance sheet shows which expenses were wordpower-related, their relative weight in the construction of wordpower as a whole, and—even more interestingly—the total financial weight of wordpower in the context of all the expenses Francesco made to govern. As in the case of chancery size, the figures inevitably have a degree of approximation, but this does not change the big picture emerging from the balance sheet.

There are three entries in the balance sheet that are undoubtedly wordpower-related: in order of appearance, 'the mounted messengers, considering ordinary and

118 Povolo 1981, Id. 1997, Grubb 1988, Viggiano 1993.

119 ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 26, l. 123: 'Summario de tutta la spesa del ducal dominio di Milano,' 'Monta la spesa per tutto l'anno 1525 312,509l.'

extraordinary expenses for the whole year;’ ‘the stationers, for the supply of paper and other commodities for the offices;’ and the entry for ‘the ducal secret chancery and [the chancery] of the income,’ which refers to the salaries of chancery members.¹²⁰ There are other entries that certainly hide a quota relatable to wordpower (for example, the total expenses for single magistracies sometimes explicitly include those for their chanceries;)¹²¹ and, in turn, the amount paid to stationers certainly includes the expenses for paper that was not used for wordpower, in the sense that not all paper travelled (in the form of letters or other paperwork) around the Duchy of Milan. Yet, isolating these entries allows us to realise the three main items of expenditure entailed in the making and delivery of documents: the materials the document was made of and those used to write it (paper/parchment, ink, quills, and so forth;) those who wrote the documents, i.e. chancery members and their salaries; and those who took the documents to destination, i.e. the mounted messengers. Hence, any time the Sforza leadership wished to make its presence tangible through paperwork, it had to take a three-fold financial effort into account.

How onerous was this financial effort? The numbers associated with the entries provide a reliable order of magnitude: in 1525, the ducal *Camera* paid (or expected to pay) 3,000*l* to stationers for writing materials; 9,026*l* for the salaries of secret- and financial-chancery members; and 32,000*l* for the ordinary and extraordinary messenger service. This last figure is certainly the most impressive: it shows that the delivery of letters to the peripheries of the Duchy was the principal financial burden of wordpower. It cost more than ten times the materials of letters and letter-writing; and even considering that not all the paperwork carried by the mounted messengers originated in the secret and financial chancery, it nonetheless cost more than three times the salaries of the writers working in the most important centre of documentary production under Sforza control.

However, these figures become truly revealing only when compared with the rest of the voices of expenditure listed in the balance sheet. The 32,000*l* investment in mounted messengers was the second largest item of expenditure *overall*. It was second only to the money spent for the Italian pensioners (*Pensionarii Italiani*, 34,365*l*)—various figures who received a sum of money from the Sforza *Camera* in exchange for political support, or at least for non-hostility. Still, delivering Sforza documents cost more than all the Senators (22,800*l*), more than all the German pensioners (24,875*l*), and more than all the salaried officers of Pavia, including the lecturers of its renowned university (29,456*l*),

120 *Ivi*: ‘officiali de li cavalarii computato ordinario et extraordinario de tuto l'anno;’ ‘cartarii per el fornimento del palpere et altre cose per li offitii;’ ‘cancellarie ducale secreta et de le intrate.’

121 *Ivi*, for example: ‘the *Magistrati Ordinari* with the clerks (...) working for them.’ [my translation]

of Cremona (the second most important important city of the Duchy , 24,013*l*), and even of Milan (the capital, 26,518*l*). In this perspective, it is clear that Francesco II regarded the circulation of the ducal written word as a fundamental endeavour. Furthermore, also the expenses for the salaries of chancery members and writing materials are significant. The chancery, with its cost of 9,026*l*, ranked as the third most expensive institutional body out of sixteen listed, far behind the Senate (22,800*l*) but comparable to the *Maestri delle Entrate Ordinarie* (11,200*l*). And the money paid to stationers, 3,000*l*, equalled the expenditure for the maintenance of an important office like the treasury (3,234*l*). Generally speaking, the three wordpower-related items of expenditure combined accounted for 44,025*l*, and represented one-seventh of the total balance of the year. This means that for every seven *lire* the duke spent with the aim of ruling the Duchy, one was used for making and circulating documents.

Figures like these would already be very interesting if we were dealing with a rich Renaissance prince ruling a peaceful dominion; they would highlight the great importance that the said prince placed on well-working political communication with his subjects. But in the case of Francesco II, the context makes the figures even more outstanding. We have a severely cash-strapped duke, struggling to rule a war-torn dominion, who spent one-seventh of his very limited (and therefore very precious) substances in making and delivering documents which carried implausible narratives of power (the 'language of governance,') and orders that (as seen in the previous section) the duke did not necessarily expect to be executed, and only hoped that they would be accepted without signs of confrontation. This choice would be puzzling if we did not assume that the act of spreading wordpower was a very important political practice, independently of its concrete administrative results.

To recap and conclude this chapter, it is appropriate to go back to the two questions posed at its beginning: what was the role of the chancery when it acted as an instrument of Francesco II and the Sforza authorities? What was the goal of the letters the chancery sent? The questions, at first glance, looked trivial. However, in the attempt of considering the work of the chancery as a practice meaningful in itself—instead of as a neutral political-administrative only—I was able to identify four elements suggesting that the making and deployment of ducal documents, far from being a merely functional endeavour, had a crucial symbolic (or representational) side.

Firstly, by adopting a comprehensive approach of the *Registri delle Missive*, I

have argued that their compilation and constant updating were dictated not only by the pragmatic need of tracking the correspondence with various subjects around the Duchy of Milan, but also by the will to objectify the idea that the Sforza had a deeply-rooted claim on the control of certain territories. In this sense, the *Registri delle Missive* are much more than the sum of their single entries: they are, in themselves, monuments to Sforza authority.

Secondly, I have observed that the language of governance relentlessly reproduced in the registers—and therefore relentlessly deployed 'on the ground' in the correspondence with the Duchy's peripheries—was not always primarily aimed at recounting the reality of current affairs, but rather at projecting the image of Francesco II's authority. This happened in all cases, even when (as I have shown) hiding Francesco's powerlessness was practically impossible. For this reason, I have asserted that the delivery of documents was a largely symbolic activity, a minimum statement of authority consisting in the very act of physically reaching a distant subject with a material object (the letter) carrying a solemn language.

Thirdly, I have corroborated this last assertion drawing attention to the distinction that Francesco II and his chancery made between 'accepting' and 'obeying' or 'executing' their letters. If in the Duchy of Milan (as elsewhere in Europe) the mere acceptance of a letter was considered a meaningful sign of allegiance to the authority, then it becomes clear that—seen from the opposite perspective—the delivery of letters was regarded as an important act of power. This is so true that Francesco seems to have often tolerated *de-facto* disobedience, whereas he reacted more firmly when subjects refused to receive his letters.

Finally, in order to link facts to figures, I have used a Sforza balance sheet to demonstrate that despite the functional inefficiency of the correspondence with subjects in his dominion, Francesco II was nonetheless willing to invest much of his very limited financial resources in the making and circulating of documents. This is a last, substantial clue that the representational side of wordpower was fundamental.

Conclusion

At the beginning of my thesis, I hypothesised that the analysis of the processes happening around chancery documents could deliver valuable historical insights. By asking who partook in the endeavour of document-making and how, and if and how the very meaning of documents is transformed once we are aware of the background of their production and use—so the hypothesis went—we might achieve a much more nuanced and participatory perspective on Renaissance political and institutional history. I have used the notion of 'practice' (defined at p. 15, and again at p. 94) as a key to explore this hypothesis, in the attempt to go beyond classic studies focusing solely on chancery structures.

In Chapter 3, I have investigated how social, political, and cultural practices undertaken in the chancery affected its functioning. The results of my inquiry highlight two major points. Firstly, the assessment of cultural practices demonstrates that the chancery not only was a centre of documentary production, but also acted as an autonomous community in the city of Milan, and as a centre of scholarship with a strong literary output. We should take this variety of functions into due consideration if we aim at thinking the chancery in cultural-historical terms. Secondly—and more importantly for the purposes of this dissertation—the assessment of social and political practices reveals the great extent to which the self-styled 'secret' chancery was in fact systematically open to continuous interaction with a wide range of outsiders. Various figures (counsellors and *camerieri*) worked in direct and informal contact with chancery members and had nearly-unlimited physical access to chancery premises; furthermore, more casual strangers seem to have had surprisingly good chances of partaking in chancery activities too.

In Chapter 4, as we have just seen, I have re-framed as an endeavour that was not merely logistical and functional, but had its own significance, the act of keeping in regular contact with the peripheries of the Duchy of Milan. My argument is that the delivery of chancery documents not only served strictly administrative purposes, but also was in itself a crucially important practice of authority that allowed sovereigns to make their power visible: either in the archive (where a duke like Francesco II could take advantage of, and augment, the sheer number of registers objectifying the Sforza's rule over their dominions) or in the territory of the Duchy (where having a letter 'accepted' by subjects meant establishing a minimum degree of jurisdiction.)

Therefore, the focus on chancery practices sheds light on two essential aspects of wordpower that cannot emerge from an analysis centred on chancery structures and rules.

The first aspect is that wordpower, despite being officially an asset exclusively owned by the duke and his inner circle, could, in fact, become a very *shared* and *collective* resource. Indeed, as we have seen, the chancery did not separate insiders from outsiders, but rather integrated them. As a result, a very wide variety of relations of power could bring to the making of a chancery document: not only top-down, but also bottom-up. The second aspect is that wordpower, in addition to its most obvious political-administrative function, had great *symbolic* and *representational* significance. Chancery documents not only served as means through which the Sforza leadership managed political-administrative affairs, but also as the material embodiment of authority. The act of writing a letter was often more important than the letter's contents.

The collective and representational character of wordpower as it emerges from the study of chancery practices definitively undermines the notion of Renaissance chancery as a bureaucratic institution—an office marked by a clear hierarchy of authority, adherence to fixed rules and procedures, and rigorous separation between insiders and outsiders—that I already started to put into question in Part I. The findings so far add up to a richer picture: firstly, the chancery not only was a centre of documentary production, but also acted as a fellowship (*consortium*) and as an academy (*academia*); secondly, the chancery not only provided a documentary output, but was also a dynamic hub managing sensitive information and operating at the core of political communication; thirdly, the chancery was not an isolated, monastic-like scriptorium, but a systematically open place of social encounter; finally, the chancery, even when it actually acted as an instrument of authority, did so pursuing aims that were often more symbolic than pragmatic. Thus, the documentary interface between the authorities and their subjects was marked by distinctively non-bureaucratic traits, that included elements of social relations and cultural symbolism.

What is crucial to highlight, to conclude this second part of the thesis, is that from a different conception of Renaissance *written* political culture necessarily derives a different conception of *political culture* tout-court: a different conception of authority. While the focus on chancery structures, rules and representations propounds the classic image of a strictly top-down, coercive authority exerted by the sovereign on mostly passive subjects, the focus on chancery practices tells a different story, one where authority is seldom imposed from above, and is often constructed through exchange, negotiation, compromise. The challenge of the third part of the thesis will be to demonstrate that a material analysis of chancery documents is able to corroborate this

interactive idea of authority.

Part III – Chancery Products

Chancery products representing the documentary interaction between the authorities and their subjects (or other authorities) can be divided in two broad categories. The first category is composed by letters close (or letters missive,) which were used in correspondence and could foresee a communication exchange—the recipient could respond to the letter. The second category is composed by the seigneurial documents *par excellence*, letters patent, whose issue established juridical acts (donations, concessions, appointments to offices, safe-conducts, and so forth) and envisaged no reply.

At first sight, there seems to be an evident mismatch between the fluidity of the *processes* of creation of letters close and letters patent one side, and the formal fixity of letters close and letters patents as finished *products* on the other. On the one hand, processes of document-making were extremely receptive to political and social tensions. As highlighted in Chapter 3 (pp. 117-118), the *expeditioni* were often extemporaneous, fragmented (in the sense that they came from different and mutually independent branches of the Sforza chancery) and spatial (in the sense that they were highly dependent on where chancery members found themselves, and on who was with them.) On the other hand, as we have already begun to see in Chapter 4 (pp. 132-139), official documents all relentlessly purport the sovereign—in our case Francesco II—as the documents' sole and undisputed author. This is so true that the standard diplomatic definitions of letter missive (p. 47, n. 67) and letter patent (p. 16) both insist on the individuality of the author, seen as an unmistakably well-defined entity.

But are chancery products actually so impermeable to the socio-political complexities of their making process? Did the diverse and informal chancery practices discussed so far leave material trace in the documents? Or, to set an even more ambitious aim: can a material analysis of chancery documents enhance our understanding of chancery practices?

As anticipated in the general introduction, the discipline that we have at our disposal to study documents from a strictly formal point view—diplomacy—is unfit to answer these questions. Indeed, diplomacy minutely analyses all the formal ways in which authority is represented on documents, but does not question whether the representation of authority matches the reality of its construction. Diplomacy studies documents in a political and social vacuum: its main objective is establishing if they are formally correct and authentic.

My objective is exactly the opposite: I wish to study the materiality of documents as a means to reveal (and not to discard) the socio-political complexities of the processes of document-making, thus unveiling new layers of meaning conveyed by the documents themselves. I have defined this approach as 'new' diplomatics, because it is less descriptive and more interpretive than 'classic' diplomatics, and combines many concepts and the vocabulary of classic diplomatics with other fields of study. On the one hand, I will engage with the insights coming from the material analysis of textual objects other than chancery documents. On the other, I will engage with the key-concepts of material culture insofar as I will use objects as evidence for my arguments.

Firstly, the insights coming from the material analysis of textual objects other than chancery documents are crucial to realise that textual authorship is often much more complex and plural than the texts' strict contents would suggest. Indeed, in the last few years, scholars have come to detect forms of collaborative and 'social' authorship in almost every kind of text—such as literary ones, public proclamations, private letters.¹ Why have not chancery documents undergone an equally thorough critique of their authorship in the light of material analyses? It is as if, with a presentist bias, scholars considered chancery documents as 'too official,' 'too authoritative' to be compared with the rest of medieval and early modern texts and their fluidity. Historians sometimes do acknowledge that the sovereign behind the documents is often a *persona ficta*, a fictitious, plural person hiding an entire apparatus.² However, this important acknowledgement is just declared, but not supported by adequate reflection. Indeed, the sovereign-as-*persona-ficta* would be unproblematic only so long as his apparatus showed a clear distinction between insiders and outsiders, regulated norms of access, and stable procedures of decision making. But when these conditions are absent—and, as we have seen, they were for the Sforza governance in general, and for the period of Francesco II in particular—the interpretation of the *persona ficta* becomes much more complex. I will address exactly this problem: through a material analysis of chancery documents, I analyse the extent to which the sovereign's *persona ficta* could be owned and manoeuvred by third parties, independently from the real person to which it theoretically corresponded.

Secondly, and more generally, my engagement with material culture rests on the conviction that the form of documents-as-objects really matters. While classic diplomatics has the aim of focusing on formal analogies between documents in order to assign them to clear-cut typologies, new diplomatics has a different approach: it focuses

1 See bibliographic references at n. 24, p. 23.

2 The expression *persona ficta* is used in Covini 2008, 21. See also Gamberini 2005a, 46-47.

on differences—on the unique forms displayed by documents, and on the meaning that such forms encapsulate.³ As Ulinka Rublack puts it in a recent article entitled *Matter in the Material Renaissance*, ‘the Renaissance (...) was a made world and a world in the making,’ where ‘[m]any items could not be bought ready-made.’ As a consequence, ad-hoc choices and customisations are not to be dismissed as exceptions, but had a distinctive significance, and modern scholars need to attempt to regain it.⁴ What is true of objects of consumption was also true of documentary objects, letters close and patents, issued by the highest authority in a state for communicating with subjects and correspondents.

In light of all the above, I will divide my material analysis of documents in two chapters, one dedicated to letters close (Chapter 5) and one to letters patent (Chapter 6). In the chapter on letters close, given the necessity to study the original products made and dispatched by the chancery of Francesco II, I will temporarily abandon the archives of Milan and move to the State Archives of Mantua and Trent, where two very substantial series of Sforza letters are preserved. These letters invariably offer one basic narrative: Francesco, in person, addressed some members of the Gonzaga family (the ruling dynasty of Mantua) and the prince-bishop of Trent Bernardo Cles. However, what stands out about the two archival series is the great formal variety of the documents they contain. Is it possible to find a solid connection between the physical aspect of the letters and their contents, or the situation that originated them? Did the letters all have the same value and meaning in the eyes of their senders and their recipients, independently from their form? Most importantly, though, formal variety clearly signals that the making of documents followed a multi-staged process, nearly always collaborative. How deeply did such process affect the authorship of the letters?

In the chapter on letters patent, I will come back to the Milanese archives to analyse the charters preserved in two collections: one at the State Archives, named *Diplomi e Dispacci Sovrani* ('Sovereign Diplomas and Dispatches') and one at the *Archivio Storico Civico* (Municipal Historical Archives), named *Cimeli* ('Memorabilia'). The special modes of preservation these documents underwent suggest that past historians and archivists regarded letters patent as precious emblems of sovereign authority. And indeed, this is exactly the image that these charters convey as finished products with their outstanding size, fine writing materials, huge seals, and decorations. But should we

3 In parallel, for example, with Bernard Cerquiglini's new philology, which concentrates on variants rather than the 'Ur-text.' See Cerquiglini 1999.

4 Rublack 2013, 45-46.

accept this image uncritically? If we had the chance to study the assembly process of letters patent in detail, would their narrative of unchallenged ducal authority hold? Would letters patent resemble more an imposing monument, or a complex socio-political jigsaw?

In concluding this part of the thesis, I will ask whether the material analysis of chancery documents substantiates the nuanced and participatory notion of authority I have been developing through the analysis of how chanceries functioned. Furthermore, I will also ask whether the very idea of what chancery documents are and do changes once we are aware of the elasticity of their authorship and the meaning of their forms.

Chapter 5 – Letters Close

1. Sources and background: Francesco II, the Gonzaga and Bernardo Cles

The largest collection of letters close produced by the chancery of Francesco II—426 letters in total—comes from the Gonzaga Archive (*Archivio Gonzaga*), housed at the State Archives of Mantua.⁵ The archive holds a series called 'Foreign Correspondence' (*Corrispondenza Estera*) with documentation coming from the Duchy of Milan (*Milano*), which in turn has a sub-series called 'Letters of the Lords of Milan to the Gonzaga' (*Lettere dei Signori di Milano ai Gonzaga*). Those of Francesco are preserved in three folders (nn. 1616-1618) and cover the years 1514-1535.⁶ The current order of the *Archivio Gonzaga* does not correspond to the original one, but results from an arbitrary thematic rearrangement of the documentation that took place during the second half of the eighteenth century.⁷

The correspondence between the Sforza and the Gonzaga is abundant for at least three reasons. The first is administrative: the Duchy of Milan and the marquisate (then Duchy) of Mantua bordered along the Oglio river in today's south-eastern Lombardy, and cooperated intensely to keep order in the area—which generated a continuous exchange of information. The second reason is political: during the Italian Wars, Milan and Mantua were often allied on the imperial side, and the fortunes of the Gonzaga were strongly bound to their relationship with the Habsburg, just like those of Francesco II.⁸ Finally, the Sforza and the Gonzaga were related. Marchioness Isabella d'Este-Gonzaga (1474–1539), one of the most famous women of the Italian Renaissance, was Francesco's aunt (the sister of his mother Beatrice) and this represented a strong connection between the two families.⁹ Such connection was embodied by Giorgio Andreasi (1467–1549), a prominent and skilled Mantuan courtier whom Isabella placed at the side of Francesco as early as 1513, and quickly became one of the most trusted men of the Sforza party. Past and recent scholarship does not specify the capacity in which Andreasi assisted Francesco until the

5 Divided per year: 2 (1514), 1 (1515), 1 (1516), 2 (1517), 1 (1518), 10 (1519), 9 (1520), 6 (1521), 67 (1522), 91 (1523), 18 (1524), 27 (1525), 3 (1526), 37 (1527), 35 (1528), 17 (1529), 19 (1530), 23 (1531), 17 (1532), 13 (1533), 17 (1534), 10 (1535).

6 ASMn, *Archivio Gonzaga, Dipartimento di Affari Esteri, Milano, Lettere dei Signori di Milano ai Gonzaga*, 1616-1618 (henceforward ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*).

7 *GGAS*, vol. 2, 767-768.

8 One of Matteo Bandello's *novellas* focuses on the vicissitudes of pro-Sforza exiles in Mantua between 1515 and 1521, defining the city as their 'most trustworthy harbour and safe shelter.' Bandello 1992, *novella XXVIII* (citation at p. 280).

9 On Isabella d'Este, see Cockram 2013, Bonoldi 2015, Furlotti and Rebecchini 2008. The *IDEA* (Isabella D'Este Archive) Project, coordinated by Dr Deanna Shemek of the University of California Santa Cruz, is currently digitising a sheer number of Isabella's letters. URL: <http://isabelladeste.ucsc.edu/>.

recapturing of the Duchy of Milan, but a letter of 1514 reveals that Andreasi was his secretary; then, after 1522, Andreasi served as Senator and as Sforza broker at the Papal court in Rome (1530–1535).¹⁰

The second corpus of letters analysed in this chapter was addressed to Bernardo Cles (1485–1539), prince-bishop of Trent and Cardinal from 1530. Today, these letters are to be found at the State Archives of Trent in the archive known as *Corrispondenza Clesiana*—which represents what remains of Cles's huge epistolary—in file n. 10 of a folder named 'Letters from Sovereigns and Princes' (*Lettere di Sovrani e Principi*).¹¹ Despite being much smaller than the collection of letters preserved in the *Archivio Gonzaga*—42 letters written in the course of 17 years, between 1518 and 1535—the correspondence in Trent constitutes one of the most relevant testimonies of the events involving Francesco II throughout his life. In order to understand the reason of its importance, it is necessary to provide a short profile of Cles, and to explain why he became a key-figure for Francesco.

Bernardo Cles was one of the most important personalities in European high politics between his accession as bishop of Trent (1514) and his death in 1539. During these twenty-five years, Cles became a pivotal character in the court of the Habsburg, acting as Supreme Chancellor to Archduke of Austria Ferdinand I from 1528. As scholars now agree, he was a successful politician and prelate, as well as a learned humanist and patron of the arts.¹²

The special relationship between Cles and Francesco II dates back to the very beginning of the 1500s, when a portion of the Sforza party sought refuge in imperial Tyrol after the fall of duke Ludovico. Massimiliano Sforza—then the designated duke—was directed to Innsbruck to join Emperor Maximilian of Habsburg, whereas Cles was

10 ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1616, Milan, 1514 June 22: 'Having commissioned to the Reverend Sir Giorgio Andreasio, my secretary (...)' ('Havendo io commisso al Reverendo Monsignor Giorgio Andreasio, mio segretario (...)'). For a biography of Andreasi, see Raponi 1961. For Andreasi's activity as ambassador in Rome, see Oldini 1989.

11 The overall consistency of the *Corrispondenza* is estimated to more than 4.000 letters, divided in two series (I-II) and 20 *mazzi* (folders: series I has 15 folders, series II has 5 folders), each folder further divided in files. The majority of the folders pertains to the administrative and political career of Cles: for example, folder 1 gathers the letters from emperor Maximilian I and some imperial military captains; folders 2 and 3 gather the letters from Ferdinand I of Habsburg; folder 4 pertains to the ecclesiastical side of Cles's contacts, with letters from popes, cardinals and prelates; folder 5 preserves the letters from sovereigns and princes, and so forth. The last three folders of series I (nn. 11, 12 and 13) gather the letters from *privati* (private people) and list some 150 senders. The division of the *Corrispondenza* in recipients does not correspond to its original order, but was arranged between 1831 and 1860, when the documentation was preserved in Innsbruck: I owe this information to Dr Katia Occhi of the Istituto Storico Italo-germanico of Trent, whom I wish to thank. For the complete inventory, see http://151.12.58.234/asTrent/indici/pdf/INDICE_N_75.pdf (last accessed date 4 June 2015). The letters of Francesco II are to be found in ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10.

12 Prodi 1987. For a biography, see Rill 1982.

given custody of Francesco. After the end of the short-lived reign of Massimiliano (September 1515), Francesco soon fixed his headquarters in Trent again (1516) and waited there until he recaptured the Duchy of Milan in April 1522. During these years, Cles was the future duke's mentor, offering not only material and military backing, but also educational guidance, and a political support that would continue well beyond the exile.¹³ The aid received during this precarious period understandably originated the sense of devotion Francesco felt for Cles, which is effectively condensed in a statement dated 4 July 1522. Here, in a very confidential letter, Francesco—newly restored in his ducal dignity—emphatically responded to the prince-bishop's congratulations on recapturing the Duchy; he offered his services and wrote that Cles should have rather congratulated himself, because ‘beyond being the bishop of Trent,’ he was also ‘the duke of Milan.’¹⁴

In the next thirteen years, between 1522 and 1535, a privileged axis would continue to exist between Milan and Trent, which included mutual political aid, material assistance in case of famines and shortage of basic necessities,¹⁵ the exchange of trusted men and sensitive information,¹⁶ and a reciprocal influence in artistic patronage.¹⁷ This connection would outlast both Francesco and Cles, and it is no coincidence that the latter's successor as prince-bishop, Cardinal Cristoforo Madruzzo, would later become Governor of Milan under Charles V between 1556 and 1557.¹⁸

Francesco II's letters in the *Archivio Gonzaga* have not undergone any historical analysis, even though scholars have generally devoted great attention to the correspondence between Milan and Mantua.¹⁹ This is probably due to the general lack of interest for the figure of Francesco. Also, a good share of the correspondence between Milan and Mantua relates to administrative affairs involving south-eastern Lombardy, not a very alluring subject. The situation is only slightly different for the correspondence

13 According to Rossana Sacchi, Cles could have been responsible for the duke's humanistic education. Sacchi 2005, vol. 1, 26.

14 ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, 1522 July 4: ‘quella se debe (...) ley congratularssi cum se stessa per che ultra che vescovo di Trento le anche duca de Milano.’

15 See for example ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, XIV, Copybook n. 7, l. 13, 1532 February 2.

16 The cleric Giacomo Bannasio, canon of the *Duomo* of Trent, was Francesco's agent in Rome during the 1520s: Rill 1963; Nikolaus von Trauttmansdorf, a Tyrolean man of arms, was appointed castellan of Trezzo in Lombardy (ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Monza, 1522 July 4). Vice versa, Francesco II obtained from Cles the appointment of one Giovanni Grassi, member of the exiled Sforza household, as *Capitano del Ponte* (a minor administrative office—ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Trent, 1518 March 7); Andrea Borgo and Paolo da Lodi, two former Sforza chancery clerks, were co-opted in the imperial ranks and were in close and continuous contact with Cles (see ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, VIII, 1-4; on Andrea Borgo see Rill 1971). As for the exchange of information, the correspondence of the 1530s mainly consists of *avvisi* exchanged between Francesco II's and Cles's chanceries.

17 Sacchi 2005, vol. 1, 159-161 (especially p. 159 n. 151), pp. 270-271.

18 Becker, ‘Madruzzo, Cristoforo’ (2006).

19 Leverotti 1999–[2003].

between Francesco and Bernardo Cles. In 1966, the letters attracted the attention of a Trent-based expert of the *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, Renato Tisot, who devoted an article to the epistolary exchange between Milan and Trent.²⁰ This specific interest is easy to explain: Tisot was working on a monograph on Cles based on the evidence offered by the *Corrispondenza*, and Francesco is clearly one of the best represented figures in the epistolary.²¹ Of the twenty-one files contained in the folder 'Letters of Sovereigns and Princes,' the one with the forty-two letters coming from the duke is the most consistent. Only the Gonzaga bear comparison with the duke's presence, with thirty-nine letters covering a similar timespan, 1516-1533.²² As anticipated, Cles, Francesco and the Gonzaga shared their strong allegiance to the Habsburg, and the two sets of letters corroborate the existence of an alliance system.

2. Francesco II's correspondence in the *Archivio Gonzaga* and the *Corrispondenza Clesiana*: forms, contents, meanings

In analysing the correspondence between Francesco II and Bernardo Cles, Tisot judges the historical value of the documents mainly by their contents. To him, the correspondence is useful only insofar as it provides new details to the *événementiel* history of the communicants. My approach to Francesco's letters is different. I am interested not only in the letters' contents, but in their formal material aspects, and—more specifically—in the discordance between two elements. On the one hand, the letters' preservation in two series called 'Letters of the Lords of Milan to the Gonzaga' and 'Letters of Sovereigns and Princes' imply a very straightforward idea of their authorship. According to the archivists that ordered them, the letters signed *with the name* of Francesco II Sforza are letters *of* Francesco II Sforza: this is undoubtedly their most logical and practical arrangement. On the other hand, though, the form of the letters within these series varies greatly. We find different handwritings, different signatures, different incipits in addressing the same recipients, different kinds of *mise-en-page*, and so forth.²³ The majority of the letters are written by secretaries, and only signed by Francesco. A handful are autographs and difficult to read, because of the handwriting and

20 Tisot 1966.

21 Id.1969.

22 ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 11 (letters from the marquises Francesco II and Federico II Gonzaga, and from the marchioness Isabella Gonzaga) and 15 (letters from Ludovico Gonzaga, Count of Sabbioneta, a man of arms who also served Charles V.)

23 Beal 2008, 255: '*Mise-en-page* (the French expression means 'putting-on-the-page') is the physical arrangement of the text—e.g. features such as indentation, columns, spaces between paragraphs, etc.—but not the selection of words themselves.'

the grammatical and syntactic errors.²⁴ Indeed, the contrast between the educated secretarial calligraphies and Francesco's untidy handwriting is perhaps the most apparent graphic feature of the correspondences, not only in Trent but also in Mantua. What does this contrast tell us?

The evidence of the *Archivio Gonzaga* and of the *Corrispondenza Clesiana* offers a great chance to analyse the rationale behind the form of Renaissance letters close, and the complexities of their seemingly obvious authorship. The starting research question is: what kind of considerations do the letters allow when tested on material and formal features, their combination and evolution over time? We can count on two sufficiently serial correspondences: the one with Mantua is the most substantial quantitatively; the one with Trent mirrors the very multifaceted relationship between Francesco II and Cles—protege and protector, disciple and educator, but also duke and prince-bishop and ally to ally—and is therefore outstanding qualitatively. In addition, it is possible to compare and contrast them: as we shall soon see, cross-checking data from the two archives provides many revealing insights.

Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to analyse the meaningful forms of letters close as they emerge from the *Archivio Gonzaga* and the *Corrispondenza Clesiana*. How many formal typologies of letters close are to be found in the two archives, and how codified were they? What was the relationship between the form and the content of the letters? What does the graphic form of the letters tell us about the sharing and re-appropriation of Francesco II's authorship? To what extent could the shared version of Francesco's authorship be independent from Francesco himself? What elements of the letters did Francesco micromanage to signify his personal presence in the documents? Did he relate in the same way with the Gonzaga and with Cles, or did he adopt different graphic strategies as well as language registers? The answers to these questions will serve as a window to the remarkable flexibility of Renaissance official chancery documents.

Let us begin from the form of the letters. The Sforza letters in the *Archivio Gonzaga* and in the *Corrispondenza Clesiana* can be divided into four different typologies. As shown in Chart 5.1 (p. 160), they differ in handwriting style (or combination of different styles) signatures, mise-en-page; the use of the personal pronoun also varies between 'I' and 'we.' I label these typologies, so that I can refer to each one quickly for the rest of the chapter: chancery letters, autograph letters, mixed letters, and holographs. Before starting to analyse them, a quick premise is necessary: I am fully

²⁴ Tisot acknowledges these facts in Tisot 1966, 106.

aware that the study of other physical features—such as paper and ink types—could have further refined our understanding of the meaningful materiality of the letters. However, developing the necessary expertise to analyse paper and ink seriously would have added too much additional work for an already dense PhD project. As far as seals are concerned, they differ slightly in size—one has a diameter of 15 millimetres, one of 28 millimetres, one of 35 millimetres—but always show the same Sforza coat-of-arms as representative picture, and I was unable to detect a significant pattern in their usage. As a consequence, they will not be mentioned in my analysis.

Firstly, chancery letters (fig. 5.1, p. 161) normally show one handwriting, or seldom two (one for the main text and one for the signature,) but neither belongs to Francesco II. Their mise-en-page is tidy (with clear margins and paragraphs,) and the personal pronoun used is 'we,' apart from some rare exceptions. Secondly, autograph letters (fig. 5.2, p. 162) represent by far the most recurrent typology. They bear two or three different handwritings, because a secretary or a chancery clerk wrote the main text, and there are two signatures: one belongs to the secretary, the other to Francesco—hence the adjective 'autograph'—who could also pen some quick valedictory words, such as a closing farewell statement. The personal pronoun used is 'we.' Thirdly, In the mixed letters (fig. 5.3, p. 163), we normally find a spectacular contrast between the educated chancery hand that writes the main text, and Francesco's personal message written in a very cursive, hasty handwriting. In these letters, we find only one signature, that of Francesco. The personal pronoun used is 'we.' Finally, in the holographs (fig. 5.4, p. 164), Francesco materially wielded the pen and wrote the entire letter to the Gonzaga or to Cles personally; he is also the only signatory. The mise-en-page of the holographs is much less tidy than that of the other three typologies: the margins are less clear, or even non-existent, and so are the interior intervals of the text. The personal pronoun used is 'I.'²⁵

One first consideration to make is that all these four typologies coexist in the *Archivio Gonzaga*, whereas there is only one chancery letter in the *Corrispondenza Clesiana*. This fact suggests that the status of the addressee dictated the choice of letter's typology, but I will elaborate on this point later in the chapter (4.1).

What is important to highlight now, however, is the clear relation between the form of the letters and their content, or the situation that generated them. Firstly, the range of contents of chancery and autograph letters is practically the same: they deal with political-administrative matters. As anticipated, in the case of the Gonzaga they usually

25 For an article that defines autograph letters and holographs, see Daybell 1999.

Chart 1 – Summative table of typologies of Francesco II's correspondence

		Handwriting	Signature (s)	Mise-en-page	Subject's personal pronoun
1	<i>Chancery letters</i>	Chancery hand	Duke (not autograph) + Secretary	Tidy	We
2	<i>Autograph letters</i>	Chancery hand	Duke (autograph) + Secretary	Tidy	We
3	<i>Mixed letters</i>	Chancery hand + Duke's hand	Duke (autograph)	Tidy in the main text; the duke's addition can ignore margins	We
4	<i>Holographs</i>	Duke's hand	Duke (autograph)	Untidy	I

1522: 12: 12

Pavia 110

U^{me} et Ex^{ca} D^{ne} Consanguinee tanq^z Fr^{at} honoran: Alli
giorni passati detimo una l^{ra} n^{ra} al Mag^{co} Ambas^{re} de v^{ra}
Ex^{ca} in la quale li scriviamo et essendo di suo piacer^e ella
fosse contenta mandar qual^{ts} persona per v^{ra} sopra la differenza
che verresse tra li subditⁱ soi et n^{ri}, per causa del oyo, per^o
havessimo ancora noi tutto ad uno tempo mandato de li n^{ri}:
In quello instante venne avviso, como v. Ex^{ca} era partita per
andar ad N. S. per lo^o facessimo soprader li n^{ri} per expectar
il suo ritorno, prevedendo et cossi fusse et convenient^e, et
honor suo: Hora et governo inteso il suo ritorno ad Mantua:
ne e posto darli aviso, como noi savemo parati ad ogni suo
piacer^e, ogni volta et Lei mandⁱ suo Comis^{ario} per questo:
far et ancora li n^{ri} se li trovavano, et gia havemo electo doi
n^{ri} Senatori ad questo. Li quali con sinceritate habino ad
veder et intender la ragione ad chi e de le parte: per^o
miene piu desideramo cha dal Com^o n^{ro} levar tutte q^{lle}
Cause et possono portar displicentia alla Ex^{ca}. La quale
mandando, se degni farne avviso del tempo, ad cio sapiamo
gn^o miuarli li n^{ri} Senatori et Comis^{ario} Et ad v. Ex^{ca}
servicomandiamo: Pavig 12. sept 1522.

E Ill^{me} et Ex^{ca} v.

Consanguineus et tanq^z Fr^{at}
Franc^o dux A^{sti} no.

H. Moroni

Fig. 5.1: Example of chancery letter (ASMn, Lettere dei Signori di Milano, 1617, Pavia, 1522 September 12)

Trento

1521. 15. Xbre

Ill^{me} de Ex Princeps et vne Consobrine vti si hon: Mandando noi de pnti
 li lo R^{do}. v. Galeaz de preda Abbate de aqualonga: et lo mag^{co} ma
 Jo: Antonio mayno nri oratori: li hauemo comesso che da parte
 nra visiteno la Ill^{ma} s. v. et li dicano alchune cose: como da
 essi a bocha intendera, perche la pregamo a darli indubi-
 tata fede: non altrimenti como se noi li parlassemo: Et a glla
 molto se ricomandamo: Ex Tridento 15 Xbre 1521

de Ill^{ma} & Ex .s

nri Ill^{mo} & p^{re}
 Juan Amador de

Fig. 5.2: Example of autograph letter (ASMn, Lettere dei Signori di Milano, 1616, Trent, 1521 December 15)

regard the situation in south-eastern Lombardy; letters of credentials are also frequent, and testify how Milan and Mantua formed an integrated diplomatic system. In the case of Trent, autograph letters normally regard the relationship between the Sforza party and the Habsburg court, where Cles was Francesco II's most important supporter and mediator. In both archives, many documents are letters of presentation for the *viva voce*, i.e. a man whose task was to report a message orally.²⁶ The primary aim of this mode of communication was to guarantee secrecy, as the author of the memoir *Informazioni sulle incombenze dei segretari ducali* pointed out (pp. 114-115). But in the case of contacts with other courts, this solution also symbolised regard for the recipient, and it was a way to bolster connections and showcase supporters. Indeed, the letter bearers were often *gentilhomini* (literally 'gentlemen,' nobles) or the *camerieri* we have already seen engaging with these kind of assignments within the chancery walls.²⁷ The regular use of the *viva voce* works as a reminder for the continuous exchange between writing and orality.

Secondly, mixed letters can be seen as dynamic artefacts, as is demonstrated by the alternation of two different handwritings. They were created to become standard chancery or autograph letters, but some unexpected or exceptional circumstances caused Francesco to directly intervene on paper, writing with his own hand.

Finally, Francesco usually opted for holographs in two situations. Firstly, he wielded the pen and wrote a letter in its entirety when he wished to substantiate and reinforce another message, either oral or written, that was going to travel to Mantua or Trent (for some examples, see pp. 196-197 and 200-201). Secondly, he wrote with his own hand when the continuous epistolary bond with Mantua or Trent had been interrupted for some time, and he felt compelled to resume it. In effect, the *debito* ('debt') of writing—strictly connected to the status of the correspondents—was a very important hierarchical element that characterised letter exchanges, and Francesco evidently felt he was the lesser correspondent in relation to both the Gonzaga and Cles.²⁸ This is so true that the duke opened four out of the six extant holographs he addressed to Cles

26 Senatore 2009, 14; See also Id. 2007, 117. For the exchange between verbal and non-verbal expressivity in the context of late medieval and early modern diplomacy, see Lazzarini 2009.

27 There are many examples, especially in the *Archivio Gonzaga*: on 24 August 1517 (ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1616) Francesco's *amatissimo* ('most beloved') *gentilhomino* Muzio de Preda traveled to Mantua; on 23 August 1523 (ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617) it was the turn of Giovanni del Maino, *nostro parente dilectissimo* ('our most dear relative'); on 24 March 1532 (ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617) *camerero* Francesco Crivelli reached the Gonzaga. See also ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Milan, 1525 April 23: Francesco II sends *cameriere aulico* Scipione Atellani to Cles.

28 As in marital relationships, in which the duty of writing fell on wives. Ferrari 2010, 21.

mentioning his *debito* of writing, even though—lacking many of Cles's letters in the *Sforzesco* archive—we cannot know for sure whether Francesco's *debito* was always real and substantial, or rather used as a formulaic expression of reverence.²⁹ In any case, one letter (written on 5 September 1521, when Francesco was still a precarious exile based in Trent, but also wandering between many towns of the Sacred Roman Empire) clearly shows the great importance attached to this element:

I came to know about the arrival at home [Trent] of Your most Reverend Lordship through a letter of *monsignor* Pietro Martire Stampa. This made me happy: firstly, because I understand that Your most Reverend Lordship came back home safely; *and secondly, because I'm now able to pay off my debito visiting you through my letter, which I long failed to do* only because I did not know what to write, since I resided at [the imperial] court in the conditions I'm sure Your most Reverend Lordship is aware of. (...) *but I am sure you will deign yourself to forgive me.*³⁰

We shall see the importance of Francesco's autograph statements and holographs below (4.2, 4.3). For the moment, it suffices to note the strong connection between the form and the function of the letters.

3. Sharing Francesco II's authorship: letters close as processes

Another crucial connection to explore is the one between the form of the documents and the process that led to their creation. As Christian Jouhaud and Alain Viala argue in their volume on scribal and printed publication, as soon as a complex textual object (the product) is correctly seen as the final result of a series of actions (the process), establishing who prompted the creation of such object suddenly becomes less obvious than it looked at first glance.³¹

Let us consider autograph letters—the most recurrent letter typology in both the *Archivio Gonzaga* and the *Corrispondenza Clesiana*—and the succession of operations through which they were practically created. The original letters close often derived from a draft, which—as the abundant evidence in the *Sforzesco* archive in Milan demonstrates—was typically penned by a secretary (fig. 5.5, p. 167). Then, a scribe (either a chancery clerk or the same secretary) wrote down the letter in fair copy. It was only at this point

29 Bernardo Cles's letters (fifty in total) preserved in the *Sforzesco* archive span from 16 March 1531 to 8 October 1535 (ASMi, *Diplomatico, Autografi, Ecclesiastici*, 25-29); letters before 1531 are therefore gone lost. Francesco's holograph in the *Corrispondenza Clesiana* mentioning the *debito* of writing were written before March 1531, and precisely between 1518 and 1525: ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Trent, 1518 April 21; Feldkirch, 1521 September 5; Milan, 1522 July 4; Milan, 1525 May 21.

30 'Per lettere de Monsignor Petro Martir Stampa ho inteso la zonta de Vostra Signoria Reverendissima li in casa sua, il che mi he stato de somo apiazer, prima per haver inteso Vostra Signoria Reverendissima esser azonta sana, *si hanche per poter alchuna volta far parte del debito mio in visitarla cum mie lettere*, il che per molto tempo ho homesso et non per altra causa che per non saper che scriverli stando io in corte dil modo sono stato, como so sa Vostra Signoria Reverendissima, (...) *quella se degnara perdonarmi.*' [emphasis added]

31 Jouhaud and Viala 2003, 9-10.

Crimonia . p . nobr
 m^o xxxvi
 1526
 R^o cur^o Ap^o Prot^o d^ono . Jo . Casabio
 Sec^o Regis Anglie venetis ori^o nro
 ut fr^o bon^o.
 R^o cur^o d^ono ut fr^o bon^o. No^o se extendere mlti
 ni migrare v. s. Et boni officij fatti p^o ley ad
 d^ono nro, et quali ultra la sua d. s. portati
 p^o il sp^o h^o Juron^o d. Guo. Fran^o. Talora nro
 Senator ritornato da Venetia, p^o esso ad bocca
 et p^o molte sue bre^o ne siamo plenam^o informati
 p^o et spamo ro^o effetto uno giorno migrarla et
 ricognoscerla, havendogli tanta obligacione como
 li habbiamo insieme ro^o tutti soy fr^o et p^o et
 Il stabilimento nro no^o po^o esser senza l'aduto d^o
 Sec^o Re^o suo s. p^o abbiamo v. s. et^o co^onta
 co^onta^o ni soy boni officij et op^o et^o h^oer^o
 p^o sicuro, et fare^o p^o my^o forma p^o uno suo
 amorevole fr^o. Et ser^odo soy sapientiss^o ricordi
 no^o madharemo d^o expedir^o Il Talora q^oto
 piu^o p^oto. m^o franco. Et sara^o co^onta ser^odo
 le occorrene p^oto^o ogni indugio et aduto
 d^o sp^o h^o m^o d^ondetto ore nro^o madato di fare i Ad^o

Fig. 5.5: Example of Sforza chancery draft

that Francesco II entered in the process 'visibly:' apparently, he revised the letter, signed it, and handed it back to the secretary, who normally completed it with his own signature. The secretary (or a clerk) would then fold the letter, seal it, and finally write the address on its outside. This break up of the letter as process clearly shows that Francesco played a very contained role in the creation of the documents that bore his name.

The situation is quite similar for mixed letters. By adding full autograph statements underneath a chancery-hand main text, Francesco II certainly augmented the sense of his actual presence behind the document. However, with his intervention, he did not change the substance of the letter, but could only reinforce it.

Even the holographs, despite being entirely written with the hand of Francesco II, were not always completely free from chancery mediation. Indeed, the addresses on the outside of the letters were often written by chancery hands, suggesting that secretaries controlled and handled their master's personal messages and were responsible for their correct delivery.

Ultimately, the basic narrative of letters close—Francesco II personally addressing his interlocutor—proves to be rather simplistic with respect to the reality of their production: the role of the chancery in the letter-writing process was no mere clerical service. As we saw in Chapter 3, the chancery had a power of its own, and it generated many fragmented flows of writings, largely independent from each other. In light of this, the minor role the duke often played in the process of making a document is not a technical detail: it is a crucial political issue. The varying forms of letters close signal that sovereign authorship, despite being nominally personal, was open for collective *sharing*, and that it was possible to treat a more or less vast array of questions under the all-purpose coverage of the duke's institutional identity. This is so true that there is evidence of Sforza chancery clerks using the expression 'staying under someone else's signature.'³² Such a situation is especially problematic in the case of chancery letters, documents that do not feature any sign of Francesco's presence. Given the centrifugal chancery practices that emerged from the chancery *Ordines* and the memoir *Informazioni sopra le incombenze dei segretari ducali* in Chapter 3, how can we ever take for granted that Francesco had had the tiniest share of influence on letters that do not show material proof of his intervention? Apropos this issue, it is worth mentioning that Tudor poet John Skelton (c.1460–1529) satirised Henry VIII by claiming that the king by all means wrote

32 Covini 2002, 116-117: Giacomo Antiquario announced he would abandon the beneficial chancery if forced to 'stay under Cristoforo Cambiogo's *signatura*.'

letters, only without his own knowledge.³³

On the other hand, precisely because Francesco II knew that the declared authorship of the letters bearing his name was insufficient to guarantee his actual presence 'behind the paper,' he also had a wide range of formal solutions at his disposal to demonstrate a more or less weighty influence on the making of the final chancery product. In this sense, Francesco enacted a sophisticated material *re-appropriation* of his own epistolary authorship directly on the body of the letters. In so doing, he showed that his handwriting not only was a medium conveying a message, but rather was *the* message, a graphic representation of his very self. This matches the representational character of wordpower I have underscored in the analysis of the delivery of chancery documents (Chapter 4).

A further question is how far these material traits affected the understanding of these letters by their recipients at the time. It is a question of 'period eye,' the concept first devised by art historian Michael Baxandall to indicate the need of analysing the understanding of an artefact at the time of its creation.³⁴ The equivalent of Baxandall's method for textual criticism is reception theory, but generally the latter limits itself to the analysis of the contents of documents. What we see here is that—as with works of art—the period understanding of a letter was determined by its form as much as its content. In the next section, I wish to discuss two cogent cases of shared authorship emerging from the *Archivio Gonzaga* and from the *Corrispondenza Clesiana* that help answering these questions. Then, in section 4, I will explore Francesco II's tactics of re-appropriation of his own authorship.

3.1. Two cogent cases of authorship sharing from Mantua and Trent

The first case involves two letters preserved in Mantua, dated 26 June and 2 August 1522 respectively.³⁵ From the point of view of their form, both documents belong to the typology of chancery letters. A neat chancery hand wrote the main text and signed the letter with the name of the duke, and a secretary named 'Iulius' put his signature at the bottom-right corner of the letter (figg. 5.6, 5.7, pp. 171-172—as we shall see the secretary's identity is very important). We cannot be sure that Francesco II supervised the making of this document, because he did not make any sign on paper. Yet, as always, the letter is written as if Francesco himself was addressing an individual recipient, with the

33 Cited in Lehrer 1997, 87: Skelton ventriloquised Cardinal Thomas Wolsey saying 'the kynge doth wryte, / And writeth he wottith nat what.'

34 Baxandall 1972.

35 ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617, Milan, 1522 June 26; Milan, 1522 1 August.

first plural pronoun 'we' defining the subject.

From the point of view of their content, the two letters combined offer a substantial example of the political-administrative cooperation between Milan and Mantua in their bordering territories. If we are to conform to the letters' narrative, with the first Francesco II informed the marquis of Mantua, Federico II (26 June) that a robbery had been committed in Calvatone, a village on the river Oglio. According to 'the Commune and the men' of Calvatone, a captain of the Gonzaga had attacked the village with a group of soldiers, damaging the river-port and some mills, and stealing valuables. Therefore, in the second letter Francesco asked the marquis to operate for the restitution of the plunder. He based his request on the long-standing mutual assistance between Sforza and Gonzaga in fighting abuses, and (in his words) on their blood relation (*consanguineita*) and reciprocal good will (*benevolentia*). From the second letter (2 August) we understand that the marquis of Mantua had responded to Francesco's letter, and that the latter had also spoken to the Gonzaga ambassador in Milan. Francesco wished to open a joint enquiry. Two men, one chosen by Milan and one chosen by Mantua, should have gone to Calvatone to investigate the truth (*verita*) on the matter. Once again, cooperation should have taken place in the name of mutual good will, of the blood relation and of the fraternity (*fraternita*) that united the two dynasties.

Who was the author of these two letters? The answer to this question looks obvious, especially because the personal (or family) ties that bound the duke to the marquis work as the rhetorical foundation of both. However, there are two elements that put Francesco II's authorship into serious question. Firstly, at a closer look, it is clear that the first letter is nothing more than Calvatone inhabitants' version of events, only translated into a state-of-the-art chancery form—which confirms my more general argument that the chancery often worked on the basis of inputs it received from the outside world. The fact that Milan was writing to Mantua because Calvatone had signalled some complaints is explicitly stated at the beginning of the first letter.³⁶ The Gonzaga were well aware of this and evidently refused to accept that narrative of the misdeed, as we know from the second letter.

Secondly, and more importantly, it was not the Sforza secret chancery that issued the letters, but the chancery of the Senate of Milan—something which would escape our notice if we simply accepted the letter's narrative, or if we looked at the letter's modern

³⁶ 'Et pero havendone novamente significato el commune et homini nostri de Calvatone cremonese che al decimonono giorno del mese presente uno nominato Francesco Belino, capitaneo de vostra Excellentia (...).'

che sia indicata deprivare ogni cosa agitata p' le soi contra li mi p' via mabele
 et indirette: et non sempre se offeremo fare il simile verso quelli de
 via E^{ta} la quale desideramo sia conservata in bona valitudine,
 et felicitate: et ala quale se raccomandiamo: Das die die xxv Junij 1522

Ex^{te} nre Consanguineus Franciscus secundus Toros
 Vicecomes dux etc.

Julius

Fig. 5.6: Senate-chancery letter close (ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617, Milan, 1522 June 27) with the signature of the duke written by a secretarial hand and the signature of secretary Giulio Cattaneo (*Julius*) at the bottom-right corner of the letter

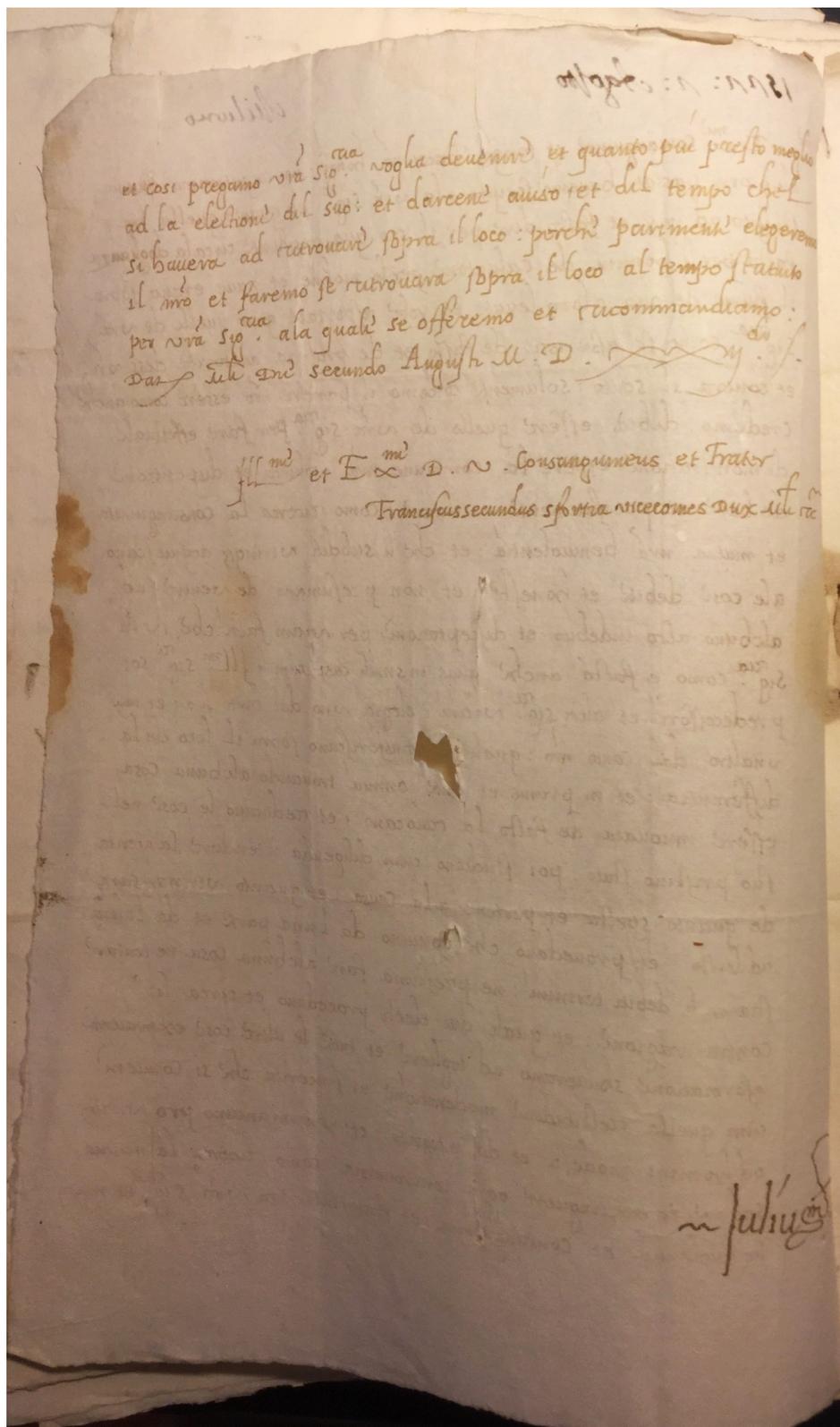


Fig. 5.7: Senate-chancery letter close (ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617, Milan, 1522 August 2) with the signature of the duke written by a secretarial hand and the signature of secretary Giulio Cattaneo (*Julius*) at the bottom-right corner of the letter

1518: 22. Agosto

Milano
255

Ill^{me} domine honoran: nonnulla nomine nro expositurus est dnano
vra Magnificus Collega nr dñs Leo Bellonus regius senator:
cui eam vt adhibeat fidelem ^{nem} vram rogamus quam nobis ipis
adhiberet. si ea coram exponeremus: neqz enim quicqz nomine
nro dicturus est. quod eidem non commiserimus: Bene autem
Ihuciter valeat dnano vra: cui nos offerimus et commendamus
as mti xxij Augr 1518

D. v. vicecancellarius et
senatores regij Mti

Julius

Fig. 5.8: Senate-chancery letter close (ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1616, Milan, 1518 August 22). The letter was written during the second French Domination, and bears the signature of the French Vice-chancellor; secretary Giulio Cattaneo signed it at the bottom-right corner with the usual *Iulius*

archival location in a series called 'Letters of the Lords of Milan to the Gonzaga.' We know this because the signature 'Iulius' stands for Giulio Cattaneo, one of the most prominent secretaries of the Senate, active also under the French between 1499 and 1522.³⁷ In fact, the same series accidentally preserves another letter signed 'Iulius,' dated 22 August 1518—that is, during the second French domination of the Milanese, when Francesco II was still in exile—a letter that Cattaneo wrote on behalf of the Senate and its president, the Vice-chancellor (fig. 5.8, p. 173).³⁸ This fact is of crucial importance, because the Senate—as I will explain more extensively in Chapter 7 (pp. 283-284)—was substantially independent from ducal control, and Francesco was very unlikely to avail himself of its chancery for making a document. In addition, the contents of the two letters confirm the attribution, because they pertain to judicial affairs, and the Senate was a tribunal. Therefore, the Senate wrote its letters close not only using the name of Francesco II, but also his personal rhetorical motives, even though Francesco himself did not play any role in them. So, what unmistakably looked like a personal letter, in fact came from a *separate* institution. This demonstrates the remarkable extent to which ducal authorship could work as a shared device.

To detect another significant case of authorship sharing, it is helpful to cross-check data from the *Archivio Gonzaga* and from the *Corrispondenza Clesiana*. On 6 February 1522, Francesco II (then still in exile) wrote from the German town of Worms to Bernardo Cles in Trent. This time we cannot doubt Francesco's presence behind the letter, because it is a holograph written in the first singular person (fig. 5.9, p. 176). The duke used his own hand to personally apologise for some 'disturbing and evil things' that happened in (or around) Trent during his absence.³⁹ Two members of Francesco's household committed a homicide, and were subsequently captured by Cles's men. Francesco wrote to Cles urging him to do justice against his retainers, adding half-ironic half-embarrassed:

I will no longer dare to come to serve you in Trent because of the good behaviour of my [men]. Ultimately we are the worst men in the world, and I am the first and even the most worst (*el piu pezor*), and I resolve to go and reside in a place where I and my men will give no dissatisfaction.⁴⁰

Words like these could have never been written through secretarial mediation, and the letter works as a beautiful demonstration of Francesco's extreme subjection to Cles,

37 Di Tullio and Fois 2014, *ad indicem*. Leverotti 2002, *ad indicem*.

38 ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1616, Milan, 1518 August 22.

39 ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Worms, 1522 February 6: 'cose fastidiose et male'

40 *Ivi*: 'io non ardiro venir piu a tenir servitu a Vostra Signoria Reverndissima in Trento per li boni deportamenti de li mey, et in fine nuy siamo li pezori homeni al mondo, et io per el primo sono el piu pezor et mi delibero de andar a star in locho che ne mi ne li mey diano sempre qualche despiazer.'

and of the connection between the form and the content of the holographs. However, this letter is also particularly interesting if put in relation to the evidence in Mantua. Indeed, at first sight, we are in the presence of a peculiar case of 'ducal ubiquity.' While Francesco wielded the pen in Worms to reach Cles in Trent (6 February), he was also writing 650 kilometres away, from Trent to Mantua: two autograph letters of the *Archivio Gonzaga* bearing the autograph signature of Francesco II were dispatched from Trent on 4 and 8 February respectively (figg. 5.10, 5.11, pp. 177-178). Something clearly does not add up: Francesco could not possibly travel the circa 1,300 kilometres of the Trent-Worms-Trent route in five days. Hence, we must conclude that Francesco's secretaries in Trent wrote on his behalf even when he was somewhere else. What is remarkable, similarly to the case of the letters close of the Senate, is the extent to which the secretaries simulated their master's authorship. Both letters are written as if Francesco himself was writing (in the first person plural,) and in the case of the 4 February letter, the 'fictitious Francesco' not only shared information, but also claimed to have met a Gonzaga agent, and to have committed him an oral message for Isabella d'Este.⁴¹ The fact that the letters show Francesco's autograph signature testifies that the secretaries were allowed to use pre-signed papers—a problem that is going to emerge again in the next chapter (pp. 240-242)—or to imitate Francesco's handwriting. Imitating the sovereign's hand was common practice in state-chanceries since at least the fifteenth century, and it felt within the prerogatives of the most prominent clerks.⁴² A famous scene of William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (written 1601–1602) describes the trick of Maria, who imitates the handwriting of her mistress, countess Olivia, to successfully deceit Olivia's would-be lover, Malvolio, despite his careful 'palaeographic analysis:' "By my life, this is my Ladies hand: these bee her very C's, her U's, and her T's, and thus makes shee her great P's. It is in contempt of question her hand."⁴³ Malvolio's attitude may work as evidence of early modern readers' attentiveness towards the authenticity of the letters they received.

Ultimately, both examples—the one of the Senate letters and the one of Francesco II's apparent ubiquity—prove that the personal ducal authorship devised in chancery and autograph letters represented a formal construction. The fact that secretaries wrote letters

41 ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1618, Trent, 1522 February 4: 'Illustrissima et Excellentissima Domina Anita et tamquam Mater Honorandissima. Questa notte e gionto Messer Capino, il quale ne ha portato dalla Corte Cesarea molte lettere (...). Ma di quanto li dira a nome nostro quella pregamo prestarli fede come sapemo faria a noi stessi (...).'

42 Docquier 2012, 399; see also Frankel 1992, 30. Many studies, referring to various different contexts, hint at the possibility of imitating someone else's handwriting: Jenkinson 1926, 156; Ganz 1997, 282; Daybell 2009, 649;

43 Shakespeare 1994, 146 (2.5, 82-85).

1522: 4: Feb^o

Trento

Ill^{ma}: et Ex^{ma}, D^{na} Anita et Tanq^o m^r honorand^{ma} Questa notte
e gionto qui m^r Capino, il quale ne ha portato dalla
Corte Cas^o molte tre, oltre, che aboccha ne habbia ancora
reffetto molte cose occurrente in g^{le} bande, delle quali
venendo in a Mantoa & alla s. v. Ill^{ma}: riposam^{te},
I nformato no a extenderemo altram^{te}, in significarli
per g^{ste} n^{re} cose allui ne reportamo sopra di no, ma
di g^{nto} li dirai nome n^{ro} g^{la} pregamo prestarli
fede come sapemo faria a noi stessi ricordando sempre
alla s. v. Ill^{ma}: et noi siamo tato desiderosi scriverla
& gratificarla g^{nto} et cosa possiamo desiderar in g^{sto}
mondo & ne fara s^{im} piacer g^o li accada l'occasioe
et alla ne op^{er} alla quale ai bon core a reconi:
In Trento alli 4. di febraro. An. D. 1522:
De. v. s. Ill^{ma}: et Ex^{ma}:

Chassegnon f^o f^o f^o f^o
de arte

Fig. 5.10: Autograph letter dispatched from Trent on 4 February 1522, when Francesco II was in Worms (see fig. 5.9) (ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617, Trent, 1522 February 4)

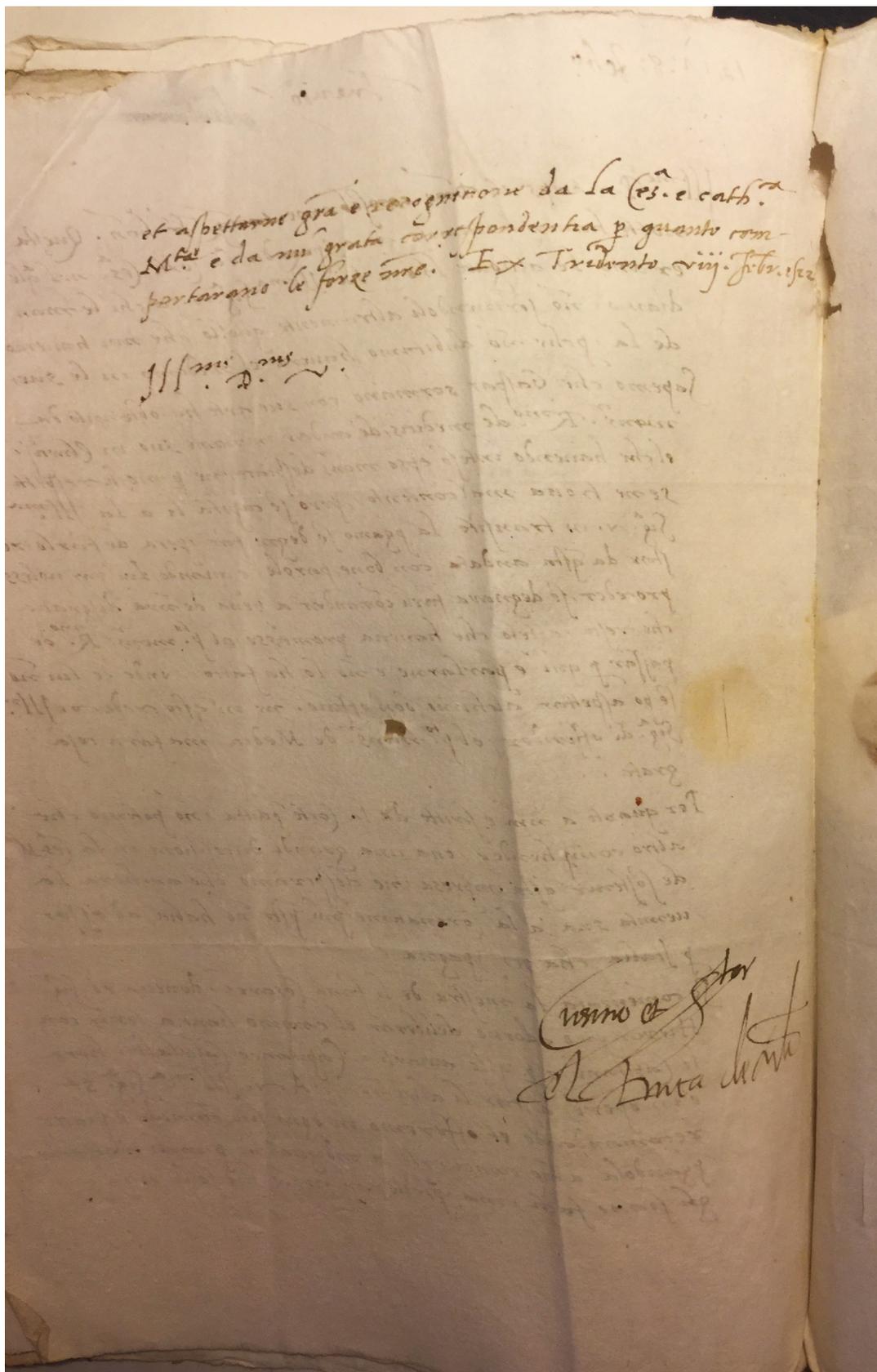


Fig. 5.11: Autograph letter dispatched from Trent on 8 February 1522, when Francesco II was in Worms (see fig. 9) (ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617, Trent, 1522 February 8)

as if they were the duke in the duke's absence may sound deceitful to us, but it is clear that they were allowed to do so. After all, getting away with such a fraud would have been nearly impossible. As for the Senate, it certainly did not need to mislead its interlocutors by pretending to be Francesco. The point is that the duke's institutional identity was open to sharing, potentially available for others to use: having *authority* in the Sforza orbit naturally gave access to the Sforza's *authorship*.

In 2005, Deanna Shemek came to some similar conclusions while investigating the culture of letter-writing of Isabella d'Este and her entourage. Shemek noticed that if we gave strict interpretation to the authorship of the marchioness's letters, we should believe that Isabella distributed ecclesiastical benefices around the Mantuan territory at the age of three, which is obviously implausible.⁴⁴ Hence, Shemek proposed a clear distinction between a modern and a pre-modern concept of authorship:

Isabella projected herself not as an 'author' but as an authority (...). Insofar as epistolary authorship (like privacy, personal space, and family relations) was a more extended concept in the sixteenth century, we must consider her correspondence to be hers. At the same time, we do well to recall that *every* letter written by a sixteenth-century noble 'spoke' in a plural voice that encompassed a number of personae (...). The voice we can know as Isabella's may be nothing more than a web of relations that, via the secretary-patron relation and a diachronic process of formation, stabilizes as an identifiable speaking subject in letters written over a long arch of time. This fact, however, calls not for complete abandonment of the notion of authorship in her regard, but for a modified and dynamic understanding of authorship regarding *all* such mediated texts.⁴⁵

Two brief considerations can be added on the basis of Francesco II's letters. Firstly, as I have demonstrated, authors who were also authorities (like both Francesco and Isabella) not only *projected themselves* as authorities, but *were also projected* as authorities by others. The latter included the duke's secretaries, of course, but also other institutions which were in much less direct relations with the duke (like the Senate,) and, we can imagine, all those who could convince these people and institution to mediate on their behalf (like, as seen above, someone in the community of Calvatone.) According to Shemek, this was the web of relations that ultimately composed the speaking subject's plural voice. However, in the case of Francesco, it would be more appropriate to conclude that multiple agents carried out an active process of plural occupation of the voice of authority.

The second consideration regards exactly the voice of authority itself. As I pointed out above, chancery hands writing on behalf of the duke normally used the first plural

44 Shemek 2003, 87-88 [original emphasis].

45 *Ibid.*: 90-91.

person 'we' to define the subject. Today, this device is known as 'royal we,' or majestic plural, and signifies the concept of majesty. I would not push myself to challenging this definition, but I would at least suggest that the intended recipients of the letters understood the first plural person also more literally, embodying an actual plurality of authors. In receiving a letter of an author-authority speaking in the first plural person, the recipient would know that s/he was primarily dealing with the authority, and not with the author.

With the last consideration we are back to the question of the 'period eye' (above, p. 169). Did recipients see all the letters close bearing the signature of Francesco II in the same way? Probably not. Giora Sternberg's study of letter writing and status manifestation in early modern France has demonstrated how early modern letter readers were able to de-code the signs marked on paper to verify whether they were appropriate, respectful, or irreverent.⁴⁶ Similarly, since they were immersed in a world where authorship was extended, shared, and inherently ambivalent—singular or plural, sometimes both—recipients were also trained to understand whether the letter in their hands was coming from its declared author, or if it originated from a much more complex jigsaw of power relations. As a matter of fact, autograph letters did not guarantee the personal involvement of the duke in their creation, their rhetoric and signature notwithstanding. As for chancery letters imitating Francesco II's authorship, they could even come from institutions that Francesco did not directly control, like the Senate of Milan. Once again, I wish to remark that this state of things matches (and derives from) the general openness of the chancery I have been highlighting while analysing chancery practices. Documentary production took place in very fluid situations, and documentary products both reflected and channelled the chancery's fluid, open-ended nature.

4. Strategies of autography

The extension and sharing of epistolary authorship posed a problem for the author whose voice became plural. The problem was appropriating and personalising that voice, in order to signal to the recipient that s/he, the author, was actually supervising or participating in the making of the letter. From this point of view, the use of autography represented a highly strategic asset. As anticipated in presenting mixed letters and holographs, some exceptional situations seemed to push the duke to write with his own hand. But how codified were these graphic solutions? The answer to this question is relevant, because it helps to establish Renaissance writers' level of awareness of (and of

46 Sternberg 2009.

care for) the forms they adopted. To what extent did Francesco II micromanage the graphic manifestation of himself in his correspondence? And to what extent was such micromanagement tailored for the recipient? The evidence in Mantua and Trent offers the chance of verifying whether the duke treated the Gonzaga and Cles equally or differently.

As we have seen, the duke could use his own hand for signatures, for adding some statements under chancery-hand texts, or for writing entire letters. Each intervention unfolded a set of different meanings. In the following pages, I will explore them.

4.1. Signatures in autograph letters

In order to understand the meaning that the signature encapsulated, the best thing to do is look at the two extremes of the correspondence with the Gonzaga and Cles, their beginning and their very end.

Starting from the end is more appropriate, because the *Corrispondenza Clesiana* finishes with a direct mention of the role of the signature. On 27 October 1535, Francesco II addressed a letter to Cles for the last time in his life. Indeed, Francesco would die soon after, between 1 and 2 November, as someone—Cles himself, or one of his secretaries—noted on the outside of the letter, under the address: *obiit dux quatridduum post a data istarum litterarum* ('the duke died four days after the date of this letter.'). (fig. 5.12, p. 183) The message contained in this last letter is very simple: Francesco apologised for not having written sooner to Trent, but nothing of importance had occurred in Milan and no relevant news came to the chancery. In addition, he was ill:

It has been some days that we have not written to Your most Reverend Lordship, both because we did not come to know anything of importance, and because of some ailment to our eye, with a little humidity, which later descended to the hands, and this much disturbed us. We are recovering at the moment, and we are confident that Our Lord God will grant us with the healing soon; but we are not free [from the disease] yet, and *for this reason, the physicians having suggested that we avoid fatiguing the hands, may Your most Reverend Lordship not be offended—but would you please excuse us—if our letter will not be signed with our hand.*

We send to Your most Reverend Lordship the summaries enclosed, containing the few [news] that we have by now, and that are worth of your consideration (...).⁴⁷

In the Renaissance and early modern world, illness was often advanced as a good reason

47 'Sono qualchi giorni che no[n] havemo scritto à Vostra Signoria Reverendissima si per non essere stato à nostra cognitione cosa degna di adviso, com'anche per certa Indispositione sopragiontani a un'occhio, con uno poco d'humidita, che doppoi ni è descesa in le mani, quale ni ha travagliato assai, et anchora che di presente si troviamo con assai bono miglioramento, et con speranza che Nostro Signore Dio ci debba fare gratia in breve di la pristina convalescentia, Nondimeno non ne siamo anchora liberi, *et per questo rispetto essendonì laudato da questi Physici l'abstenirni d'affaticare le mani, Vostra Signoria Reverendissima non prendera admiratione, ma ni hara per excusati, se le lettere nostre non seranno sottoscritte di nostra mano.* Mandiamo a Vostra Signoria Reverendissima li qui alligati summarii continenti quello poco, che per hora si trova a nostra notitia degno di sua intelligenza (...).' [emphasis added]

for the inability to write.⁴⁸ This is a sign of how the act of writing was a demanding operation, not only intellectually but also technically and physically. In the case of Francesco, the physicians believed that a simple signature could fatigue his hands.

But the especially important detail here is that the Francesco II felt obliged to apologise and to explain why he was failing to sign the letter with his own hand (fig. 5.13, p. 184), thus delivering a chancery letter to Trent instead of an autograph letter. Francesco evidently felt that Cles would notice and attach importance to such a detail, even though the message was absolutely impersonal, and certainly did not require him to remark his personal involvement behind it.

The point is that Francesco II was aware of violating a practice that he had observed for seventeen years. Indeed, all his letters in the *Corrispondenza Clesiana* shows his own autograph signature, with no exception. It had been an intentional choice, one that we could easily overlook today, but that aimed at highlighting his special regard for Cles. By contrast, as we have seen, the correspondence with Mantua shows many letters that did not bear Francesco's autograph signature. The last letter to the Gonzaga dates 17 October 1535, and was probably written when the illness of Francesco had already begun. The letter was signed by a secretary, but this did not cause any apology. Therefore, the signature was a device Francesco commanded depending on the relationship with the recipient. In the case of Cles, he wished to leave a mark on every outgoing letter, or at least made sure his secretaries used pre-signed papers to contact Trent. By contrast, in the case of the Gonzaga, he was less attentive to this custom.

Going back to the 1510s, comparing the first years of the correspondence with Trent and Mantua is also quite revealing. Gino Benzoni notes that Francesco II started signing his letters as *dux Mediolani* regularly from 1516 onwards, and this is true as far as the letters to the Gonzaga are concerned. The first letter to show the formula *dux Mediolani* in Mantua's State Archives dates 11 October 1516, even though such title would remain only virtual for almost six years.⁴⁹ On the contrary, in writing to Cles, Francesco appears to have been much more cautious in boasting his title. It was only from 1521 that he would start to define himself as duke of Milan, whereas throughout 1518 and 1519 (there is no evidence for 1520) he alternated *bonus servitor Franciscus Sforza* and *ad vita servitor Franciscus Sforza*. This initial understatement was probably motivated by a mix of humility and familiarity towards Cles: name and surname would suffice to address him. As for *servitor*, this is a common diminishing epithet that also the Gonzaga

48 Sternberg 2009, 73.

49 Benzoni 1998, 16. ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1616, Trent, 1516 October 11.

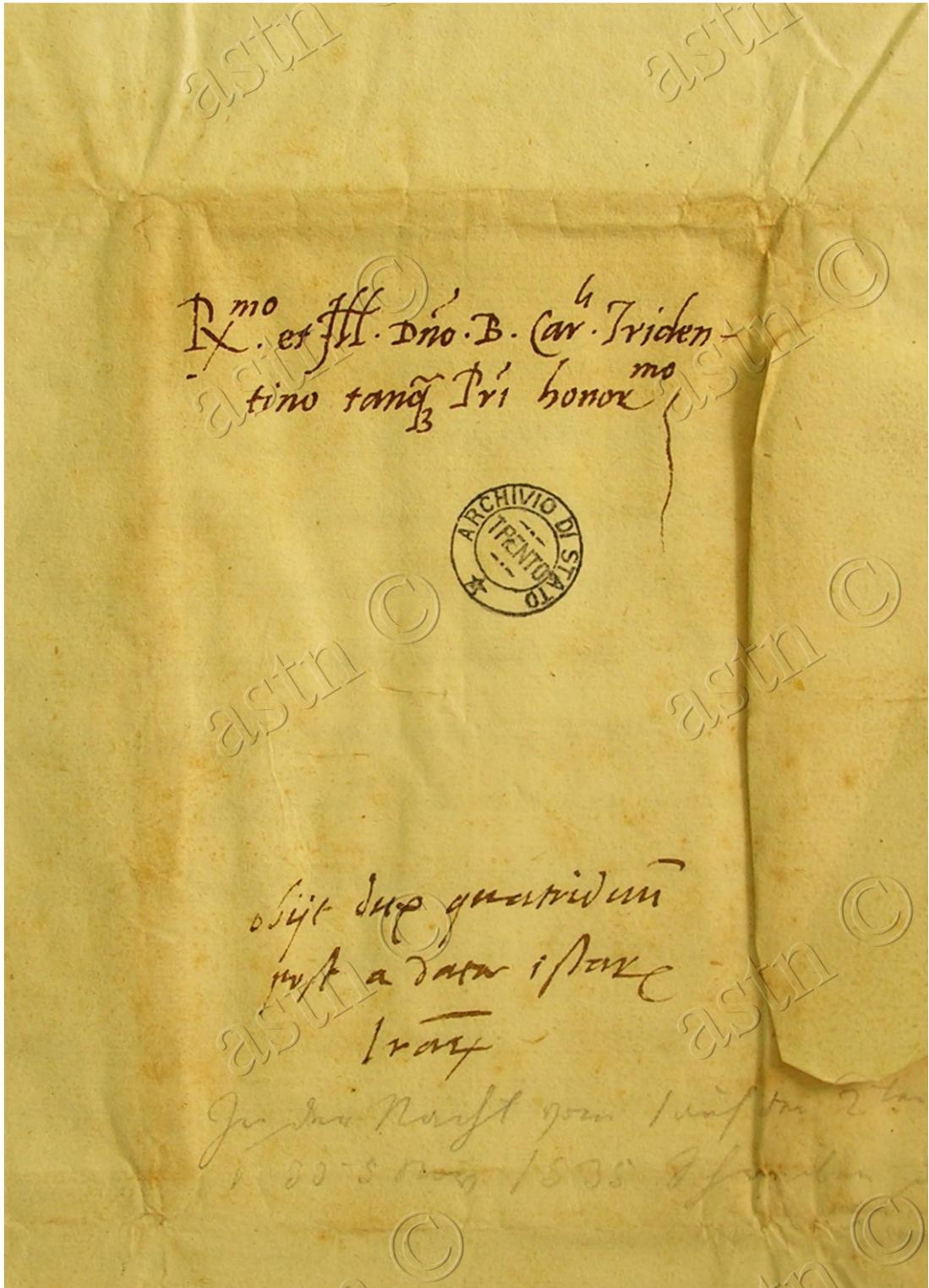


Fig. 5.12: Detail of the back of Francesco II's last letter to Bernardo Cles (ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Milan, 1535 October 27). Under the address, the note 'the duke died four days after the date of this letter'

108
27 Oct 1535
108
R^{me} e Ill. Dne tanq³ Il^{me} Sono gualehi giorni che nò hauemo
scritto à V. S. B^{ma} si per non esser stato à nra cognitione cosa
degnà di aduiso, com' anche per certa Indisposizione sopraggiunta
à un' occhio, con uno poco d' humidità, che doppo n' è descesa
in le mani, guale ni ha trouapliato assai, et anchora che di
pnte si trouiamo con assai bono meglioramento, et con speranza
che A. S. Dio ci debba far gratia in breue di la pristina conua-
lescentia. Non dimeno non ne siamo anchora Liberi: et per
questo rispetto essendomi lauclato da questi Physici Valstenirmi
di affaticar le mani, V. S. B^{ma} non prendeva admiratione,
ma ni hara per excusati, se le lre nre non seranno satisfatte
di nra mano.

Mandiamo à V. S. B^{ma} li qui alligati summarij continenti quello
poco, che per hora si troua à nra notizia degno di sua Intelligentia,
Et appresso gli Inuiamo un pacchetto de nre lre per la Ser.^{ma} Regina
Maria, pregandola ad esser contenta ordinar che stia inchicato
à bon recapto. Et à V. S. B^{ma} se raccomendiamo, et offerimo
Di Milano alli xxvij di Ottobre. M. D. xxxv

R^{me} e Ill. D. S.

Obsequentissimus Filius
Franc^{cus} Dux Mh.

Fig. 5.13: Francesco II's last letter to Bernardo Cles, the only one in the *Corrispondenza Clesiana* not bearing Francesco's autograph signature (ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Milan, 1535 October 27)

utilized in their letters to Trent. The use of *ad vita*, instead, represents a little mystery (fig. 5.14, p. 186). Francesco writes it often in the correspondence with Cles, but the formula is wrong, because the Latin preposition 'ad' would require the use of the accusative 'vitam.' As we know, Francesco was surrounded by learned secretaries and clerks: how could such a visible mistake consistently pass unnoticed? Might it be that he considered his clumsy Latin as an element that would strengthen his intimacy with Cles? I will come back to this point at the end of this chapter.

The micromanagement of autography could also determine variations of the signature that seem to have had the same mechanisms in both correspondences. Indeed, Francesco II tended to simplify his signature at the bottom of mixed letters and holographs—that is, when he wrote extensively with his own hand. He signed simply as *servitor Franciscus* two mixed letters to Mantua dated 10 May and 16 September 1531; and he signed as *obsequentissimus servitor Franciscus* a holograph dated 2 May 1534.⁵⁰ In Trent, he signed a first holograph (4 July 1522) as *ad vita servitor Franciscus*, partly because there was no space left in the bifolium (fig. 5.15, p. 187). But even when plenty of space was available, he modified his standard signature and avoided the ducal title: on 21 May 1525, writing another holograph, he signed only as *Francesco Sforza*; on the same day, a second letter to Cles with an autograph statement bears the signature *servitor Franciscus*, with no further specifications; similarly, on 12 October 1533, the writing of an autograph statement simply attracted an *obsequentissimus servitor Franciscus*.

Finally, it is useful to pay some attention to the signatures of the secretaries, because their presence interacted with that of Francesco II. The names of the secretaries at the bottom-right corner of ducal letters first appear in the *Archivio Gonzaga* in August 1522 (fig. 5.16, p. 188). This date is very important, because it represents the most accurate *terminus a quo* for the existence of an institutionalised secret chancery. Such innovation soon found a graphic representation: in autograph letters, Francesco ceased to pen the title *dux Mediolani* with his own hand, and the task was taken over by the secretary that signed underneath the duke (fig. 5.17, p. 189). These new solutions acknowledged the ongoing pluralisation of the duke's authorship: as Gamberini notes for the Visconti age, the appearance of secretarial signatures was a 'small but extraordinary' novelty, which 'allowed the recipient to know who was hiding behind the generic intitulation (...) of seigneurial *litterae*.'⁵¹ And while Francesco still wrote the name that defined his personal identity when he revised a letter, the title that indicated his extended,

⁵⁰ The three documents are in ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1618.

⁵¹ Gamberini 2005a, 46.

la prego mi venga & tale: A la Roma gratia
 di v s R^{ma} di continuo mi raccomando:
 pregandola ad haver & raccomandata la mag^{ta}
 Madona Barbara la qual he Roma serua di
 v s R^{ma}: Trenti 21 Aprilis: 1518
 D^{no} & ff^{mo} D^{no} v^{re}
 ad. roba. Starham
 Hol. S.

Fig. 5.14: An example of letter bearing the incorrect formula *ad vita servitor* (ASTn,
Corrispondenza Clesiana, V, 10, Trent, 1518 April 21)

parlate. In ni cosa di moment u prego v^s ma
 si degni farne la quella opera di penora et ha
 questo et si degni ~~scritt~~ scriverme il macheli
 honora che chnessa tener in questa franchia
 che li restan in pu ch'ean et A lei come pu
 Bon ter mi ~~scritt~~ in p^{re} a li 4 di
 l'anno 1522 homo ~~scritt~~ ho Adro ~~scritt~~

Fig. 5.15: Holograph bearing the simplified signature *Franciscus* at the bottom-right corner of the letter (ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, 1522 July 4). It is worth noticing that, as in fig. 4, Francesco II uses the wrong Latin formula *ad vita servitor*

1512: 13: Agosto Pavia

Ill^{me} et Ex^{me} Princeps, et sine consobrino vti Ti hon. Ne è fatto
 quella fede de la virtu e. bonta del. Nobile m^e Frederico de' Fidele
 Citadino Mantuano, che pregati ad prestarli el fauor nro in una
 certa sua causa li pendente non ge lo possiamo denegar, Cossi lo
 recomandiamo strettamente a v^{ill^{ma}} s in la causa fedca, certifi-
 dola ch' ne fara cosa gratissima se adiutara la bona iustitia sua
 talmente ch' possa cognosceri le nre lre hauerli portato e ouamento
 offerendone a magior gratificatione verso glla Papie xij Aug^{hi} 1522

Riccio

Fig. 5.16: ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617, Pavia, 1522 August 13. The earliest example of a letter of Francesco II bearing a secretarial signature (*Ritius*)

et indirizza sempre le cose mie al migliore porto s'ora poss.
secundo il solito suo. Così pregho v. s. R^{ma} che et in
glio gli esponera in nome mio epso Secretario al pnte, et
accadere foragli intendere nel aduenire gli reda, et
presti fede quanto ad mi stessi. Rendendosi certa v. s.
R^{ma} che quello fora per mi et stato mio, lo collocara in
persona dela quale, et dele cose sue potra sempre disporre,
come già longo tempo po di mi essere certificata. et in sua
bona gratia se raccomando. Mediolani xx decobr 1522
di ~~Vasquez~~ ~~Roma~~
Borghese
duca
de Milano
H. Moronus

Fig. 5.17: Autograph letter (ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Milan, 1522 December 20) in which a secretarial hand (probably that of Girolamo Morone) penned the title *duca di Milano* (duke of Milan) on behalf of Francesco II, who used to write it himself before the institutionalisation of his chancery

institutional identity was now physically marked by someone else. As Shemek remarks, ‘a web of relations (...) via the secretary-patron relation and a diachronic process of formation, stabilizes as an identifiable speaking subject in letters written over a long arch of time.’⁵²

4.2. *Autograph statements in mixed letters*

The second, more visible level of authorship re-appropriation was the addition of a full autograph statement underneath the main chancery-hand text of a letter. If autograph signatures were a graphic sign of respect that did not necessarily prove Francesco II's direct involvement in the making of a document—because, as we have seen, the duke signed blank papers, and some of the secretaries may have been able to imitate his hand—autograph statements almost certainly demonstrated that the duke handled a given letter.

Autograph statements are inherently ambivalent. To some extent, it is certainly possible to interpret them as outbursts of Francesco's individualism. Yet, they functioned in a more regulated way than it may look at first glance. This is first of all testified by the fact that chancery clerks duly transcribed autograph statements in the *Registri delle Missive*, introducing them explicitly with notes such as *manu principis* (‘[written with the] hand of the prince,’ sometimes abbreviated in *M. P.*), *additio manu principis* (‘addition [written] by the hand of the prince’) *hoc verba scripta sunt manu principis* (‘these words were written with the hand of the prince’), or *infrascripta fuerant manu illustrissimi duci* (‘the following [words] were [written by the hand] of the most illustrious duke.’)⁵³ These notes are particularly interesting because they serve two functions at a time, one symbolic and one technical. Firstly, the symbolic function was to solemnise the direct interventions of the duke in the documentation, as it is suggested by the choice of using Latin. If the sovereign decided to write with his own hand, the fact deserved recording because it was considered exceptional. Secondly, the technical function was one of control. The interventions of the duke were to be recorded to prevent anyone from scribbling something on a chancery letter after it was completed and delivered, pretending that the addition was a valid part of the message.

Moreover, the autograph statements show their function also if analysed within the letters to which they belong. Indeed, whenever Francesco II wrote a full statement he

52 Shemek 2003, 90.

53 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 222, l. 150, 1525 April 12; ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, l. 273, 1523 May 12; ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 222, l. 68, 1524 July 21

always remained the only signatory, whereas the secretarial signatures that would normally find place at the bottom-right corner of the last written side disappeared.⁵⁴ From the point of view of authorship, it was as if the duke had the power to stop and reverse the transition from his personal to his institutional epistolary identity (fig. 5.3, p. 163). He was able to exercise a sign of authority—both in a figurative and in a material sense—over the Sforza apparatus. A mixed letter to Federico II Gonzaga (4 January 1522) shows that this was a protocol, and not an improvised solution (fig. 5.18, p. 193).⁵⁵ Here, a chancery hand began to write the main text of the letter; at some point, Francesco stepped in with his own hand; then, he gave the letter back to the secretary, who penned the date and a short closing formula; finally, Francesco signed the letter, but the secretary—who was evidently following the elaborated process—refrained from doing the same.

In presenting mixed letters, I have already hinted at the fact that Francesco II typically used autograph statements under exceptional or unexpected circumstances; he did so to stress his authority, but the need of stressing authority often indicates a lack thereof. On 10 June 1531, for example, Francesco used his hand to complete a letter to a peripheral officer with a very blunt ‘swear to God, I will make sure you will be hanged if you don't obey the Senate as much as myself.’⁵⁶ It is worth noticing that the letter in question is perfectly formulaic: it orders the officer to let a petitioner obtain a quota of wheat, but it does so without implying any particular tension. The outstanding mismatch between the standard administrative letter and the exceptional statement of the duke therefore works as a further caveat against accepting at face value the ‘language of governance’ of the *Registri delle Missive* discussed in Chapter 4. In similar fashion, writing to some trusted agents, Francesco could add a statement with his own hand to bypass the diplomatic tone of the chancery and get straight to the point. Therefore, he was very clear with his ambassador in Rome, the above-mentioned Giorgio Andreasi, while negotiating the appointment of some clerical benefices:

Everyone is allowed to appoint not only the clerics of his own state, but also the consistory [cardinals], and the bishops. To me, being lesser than my neighbours and less submissive to His Holiness than my neighbours, they want to grant [the appointment of the] canons of Binasco. I don't want it. And I prefer being insulted by others than insulting myself [by accepting it].⁵⁷

54 ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, b. 1617, Trent, 1522 January 4; b. 1618, Milan, 1531 May 10; Milan, 1531 September 16; ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Milan, 1525 May 25; Mantua, 1532 October 12.

55 ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617, Trent, 1522 January 4.

56 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 225, 1. 33, 1531 June 10: ‘Iuro a Dio che vi faro appiccare se non obediti piu al mio Senato che a me proprio.’ Due to the lack of further evidence, I am not able to explain why the duke mentions the Senate on this occasion.

57 Reported in Oldrini 1989, 315 [my translation]. Binasco is a small town in the outskirts of Milan.

The correspondence in the *Archivio Gonzaga* and in the *Corrispondenza Clesiana* shows that also apologies and thanksgiving made a good match for autography. From this point of view, the most interesting mixed letter is the one already partially analysed above, dated 4 January 1522 and addressed to the marquis of Mantua. Apparently, Francesco II had inadvertently opened a letter for the Gonzaga coming from the Habsburg court.⁵⁸ A secretary began to write a rather standardised letter of apology, but Francesco intervened with some more heartfelt words:

I beg your Excellence to deign yourself to forgive this mistake, because I reckon I much erred, and do believe it was an involuntary mistake, and I humbly recommend myself to your good grace, I did not read it [the letter].⁵⁹

The verb 'to supplicate' (*supplicare*) is particularly important here, because Francesco seems to clearly detach his autograph statement from the chancery-hand text in order to imitate the bipartite structure of petitions (*supplicationi*), which were divided in *narratio* (the narration of the circumstances that pushed the petitioner to write the petition) and *supplicatio* (the part containing the proper plea to the authority).

The distance between autograph statement and chancery-hand text is less pronounced in two other mixed letters of apology, both preserved in Trent. In the first case, (fig. 5.19, p. 194) the duke had to repair a misunderstanding with Cles. A messenger from the prince-bishop, one 'sir Andrea,' had come to the Duchy of Milan with the order of recruiting soldiers to suppress the peasant uprising that was affecting the county of Tyrol, including the territories around Trent as part of the wider German Peasants' War.⁶⁰ Apparently, Andrea was told that Francesco II was staying at the castle of Pizzighettone—on the Adda river, the border with the Venetian territory—and went there, but Francesco was in fact in Milan, seventy kilometres far. The accident delayed the messenger's urgent mission, and it was necessary to explain that the delay had not been due to carelessness. As in the case of Mantua, the chancery prepared the apologies, but Francesco was anxious to demonstrate that he was not treating the matter routinely. For this reason, he chose to insert the autograph statement. The sentence reads: 'Your most Reverend Lordship rest assured that I'm on your side, as much as I am on my own [side]. I recommend myself to your good grace.'⁶¹ The second case, dated 12 October 1533 (fig.

Francesco is mentioning it ironically, as a term of comparison.

58 Trent, located in the Brenner valley, laid on one of the major routes between Austria and the Padan Plain.

59 'Io supplico vostra Excellentia si degni perdonarme questo herore per che conosco haver molto errato, et non lo attribuischa che ad errore non voluntario et in sua bona gratia humilmente mi racomando io non lo letta.'

60 Politi 1995.

61 'Vostra Signoria Reverendissima si tenga per certissimo che sono per lei como per me stesso, et in sua

1522: A: Com?

Trento

Ill^{me} Princeps et Dⁿⁱ consobrini tanq^u fr^{at} hon^{or}. In
uno parheto drizato a mi da la Ces. Ma^{te}
se trouauro l^ore deysa a mi et altre a la Ill^{ma}
Sig^a. v. et credendo mi aprir le l^ore a mi
p^{er} poca aduertencia aperfemo gl^ore inuano ad
ep^{is}ta e nel principio del l^ore, arori del errore
no potdessemo piu altra: q^ue le mandamo qui
alligat: ne uogha perdonar et hauer excusato
lo error mio

Io suppo v^ostra si degni perdonarme questo
honore p^{er} che onoso hauer molto errato et no
lo ammissa che ad onore ni' inuoluntario et in
sua Bona gra humete mi racomando
e ni' lo l^ore. Ex Trento m^o. Januarii. 1522.

D^o v^o Ill^{ma} Sig^a

Cusma et
fr^{at}
m^o

Fig. 5.18: Mixed letter (ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617, Trent, 1522 January 4) clearly showing the collaborative process of letter writing: a secretary began to write the letter's main text, but Francesco II stepped in the process writing an autograph statement. The secretary then wrote the date, but did not add his own signature underneath Francesco II's one

bona gratia me racomando.'

In questo mezzo v. s. P.^{ma} sera contenta di mantenerme
 in bona gratia di sua M.^{ta} con assicurarla che dopo la
 principale scrivimi et esseruntia esse dello alla Ces.^a M.^{ta}
 non bauerè altro s.^o in questo mondo piu certo che la p.^a
 sua M.^{ta} da le mure del Stato, et federtà mia non
 ho potuto piu presto incontrare et fare reuerenti a sua
 M.^{ta} Ces.^a esse qua mi mantia da la quale sono stato
 sopra ogni merito mio benvenuto et acare zato et datomi
 tal speranza che non dubito che ogni mio negotio non
 succeda notuamente. De tutto glio succedera v. s. P.^{ma}
 ne sera auisata con la quale mi hono in tanto obligo
 ho ad me sera difficile poterlo pagare. H. S. Dio
 exalt. et prosperi Il ver.^{no} P.^{ma} et ogni sua uoluntà
 come ella desidera. Alla quale seggiora v. s. P.^{ma}
 in mio nome basciare le manos et mi la bona gratia lei mi
 ric. Da manna alli xij. Hobre. An. D. M. LXXII.

Francesco II
 si uale che li sonno
 sempre come
 humilmente in ramanda
 et b. s.

Fig. 5.20: Mixed letter (ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, 1532 October 12).
 It is worth noticing how Francesco II crosses the page containing the main text of
 the letter with his own script

5.20, p. 195), signals the same anxiety. Francesco was in Mantua, where a Diet was held, and he explained to Cles that ‘the troubles of [the Duchy of Milan]’ and his ‘poverty’ had prevented him (Francesco) to meet and revere Charles V before that occasion. In addition, Francesco promised to inform Cles about the outcome of the meeting, because he was ‘much indebted’ with Cles, even though he doubted he could ever repay him.⁶² Therefore, he probably felt obliged to add a note with his own hand: ‘May Your most Reverend Lordship remember that I am a most obedient servant of yours, and I always am, [and I] humbly recommend myself to you.’⁶³

As for thanksgiving, the example comes from the *Archivio Gonzaga*. Francesco II had received a precious inkpot from marquis Federico II—a gift implying that the act of writing did have a distinct symbolic significance—and wrote back to Mantua to express his gratitude. As usual, a standardised letter of thanks from the chancery must have looked inadequate to Francesco, who wrote a very showy note occupying the lower half of the page to repeat his appreciation (fig. 5.3, p. 163).

Besides the specific circumstances that originated them, all these cases have one important feature in common: the autograph statements did not add new content to the message they integrated, but just restated something that had already been written in secretarial hand. Being graphically bigger and stylistically more informal than the main texts, the aim of the statements was adding a great deal of emotional strength and conviction to them. What mattered was primarily their performance: the *act of writing* had precedence over what was written. A mixed letter to Mantua dated 16 September 1531 is a perfect example for this point. The letter, written by the Sforza chancery, authorized its bearer (Senator Pietro Paolo Arrigoni) to bring an oral message to Mantua. Such letters of authorisation often consisted only of standard formulas, and this one would have made no exception. However, the duke added a peculiar autograph statement:

In addition to what I have commissioned, the present bearer should say to your Excellence on my behalf that I was obligated to annoy you with this bad writing of mine, to thank you very very much (*molto molto*) for the great humanity and demonstration of love, which I will keep together the others I have; shall your Excellence deign himself to always command me, I will obey; myself and what is mine is yours, and so it will always be; and I very much recommend myself to your Excellence.⁶⁴

62 ‘Io da le ruine del stato et poverta mia non ho potuto piu presto incontrare et fare reverentia a sua Maesta Cesarea (...). De tutto quello succedera Vostra Signoria Reverendissima sera avisata, con la quale mi trovo in tanto obbligo che a me sera difficile poterlo pagare.’

63 ‘Vostra Signoria Reverendissima si ricordi che li sonno obedientissimo servitor, et sempre sonno, et a lei humilmente mi racomando.’

64 ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1618, Milan, 1531 September 16: ‘Ultra quanto ho comisso dica in nome mio el presente lator a vostra Excellentia sono sforzato fastidirla cum questo mio mal scriver in molto molto ringratiar di tanta humanita et dimonstrazione di amor et lo ponero apresso li altri li tengo;

On the face of it, this passage is nonsense. Francesco *wrote* to the marquis of Mantua a message that he also wished to be communicated *orally* by Arrigoni, apologising for the bad handwriting he should have logically avoided using. Yet, the intention of the duke was clearly that of physically leaving a sign on paper to manifest his presence, and he therefore tried to connect his message to the rest of the chancery letter, eventually creating a sort of written paradox. The recipient of the letter would have not focused on the strict content of the message, but on its appearance, and the act it represented. It is worth bearing this argument in mind in moving now to Francesco's holographs.

4.3. Holographs

The analysis of the ten holographs preserved in Mantua and Trent (four in the *Archivio Gonzaga*, six in the *Corrispondenza Clesiana*),⁶⁵ like the analysis of the autograph statements, should start from their supposed spontaneity. In comparing and contrasting chancery/autograph letters and holographs, I pointed out that the former show a state-of-the-art handwriting, a tidy mise-en-page and a detached style, whereas the latter bear the much less educated handwriting of Francesco II, a haphazard mise-en-page and a heartfelt style. Given these characteristics, one may conclude that chancery and autograph letters observed strict formal conventions, while holographs did not. Yet, as Francesco Senatore points out, there were no such things as 'spontaneous' and 'free' letters in the medieval and early modern world. The modern concept of private and intimate letter is a by-product of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, what Petrucci defines as 'bourgeois letter.'⁶⁶ On the contrary, a distinct characteristic of Ancien Régime writers is their constant awareness of the forms they were adopting.⁶⁷ Paradoxically, spontaneity made no exception: it had its rules too. Not for nothing, Francesco II was a contemporary of Baldassarre Castiglione (1478–1529), the humanist who coined a term—*sprezzatura*—to define the ability of performing spontaneousness or, as Douglas Biow puts it, of being 'inconspicuously conspicuous.'⁶⁸

vostra Excellentia sempre dignara comandarme et io la obediro; et mi et cose mie sono sue et sempre sara; et a vostra Excellentia multo me racomando.'

65 The holographs in Mantua: ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617, Feldkirch, 1521 June 1; Trent, 1522 February 15; Pavia, 1522 August 12; b. 1618, Milan, 1534 May 2. The holographs in Trent: ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Trent, 1518 April 21; Trent, 1519 March 31; Feldkirch, 1521 September 5; Worms, 1522 February 6; Milan, 1522 July 4; Milan, 1525 March 21.

66 Senatore 2009, 3. Petrucci 2008, 124-127.

67 *Ibid.*, pp. 251-254. Senatore maintains that the awareness of formalities is demonstrated by the immediate acknowledgement of infractions and innovations, and by the ability of forging (or of recognizing the forgery of) chancery letters.

68 Biow 2008. See also Burke 1995.

Hence, the differences between chancery/autograph letters and holographs can be very codified and systematic. Besides writing and mise-en-page, the most visible difference lies in the greeting to the recipient (in diplomatics, the *salutatio*). In chancery and autograph letters to Mantua, the greeting to marquis Federico II Gonzaga always qualifies him as *Signor* or *Princeps* ('Sir/' 'Prince'), as *Cugino* or *Consobrine* ('Cousin'), and as *Fratello* or *Frater* ('Brother'). In the holographs, the greeting can be shortened to *Signor* only. The situation is similar in Trent. In chancery and autograph letters, Bernardo Cles is addressed to as *Princeps* and as *Pater* ('Father'), sometimes also as *Domine* ('Lord'), whereas he is only *Domine* in the holographs. Moreover, in discussing signatures, I have already noticed how Francesco II chose to drop his surname *Sforza* and his title *dux Mediolani* only when he wrote extensively with his own hand on the letter, as in the case of the holographs. Finally, despite their colloquial appearance, some expressions were strongly formulaic. One formula touched upon the very aspect of the letter, confirming its 'formal informality.' Indeed, in wielding the pen personally, the duke apologised for *fastidir* ('annoying') his recipient with his *mal scrivere* ('bad writing')—it happened in one holograph to Trent (4 July 1522) and in one holograph to Mantua (2 May 1534),⁶⁹ as well as in the autograph statement I have just discussed above.

This system of recurring features (personal handwriting, studiously haphazard mise-en-page, shortened greeting formulae and signatures, formulaic expressions,) point to a surprising parallel with late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth century France. As shown by Giora Sternberg, the *billet* emerged as a successful documentary typology, because it provided the relaxation of the cumbersome—and highly hierarchical—formal injunctions of early modern letter-writing.⁷⁰ Just like Francesco II's personal letters, the *billet* involved the systematic simplification of mise-en-page, greeting, and signature. Logically, the *billet's* informality quickly underwent formalisation: it became a viable alternative to standard letters, but its social use was just as calculated.

Francesco II himself reveals how choosing to write a holograph was a weighted strategy. A letter to his aunt Isabella d'Este begins with this reasoning:

My most Illustrious and Most Excellent Lady, most respectable aunt and mother. I have recently received one [letter] from your Excellence, which caused great joy; and I am sorry that it was written with the hand of your Excellence, because you should not have done it at your inconvenience; I will always be satisfied with a letter

⁶⁹ ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Milan, 1522 July 4: '(...) non ho voluto lassar venir questa posta qual io mando a la Corte Cesarea senza questa mia mal scripta per piu fastidir Vostra Signoria Reverendissima (...)' [emphasis added]; ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1618, Milan, 1534 March 2: 'Non la fastidiro col mio mal scrivere (...).'

⁷⁰ Sternberg 2009, 74-78

signed with your own hand.⁷¹

Here, Francesco clearly identifies two of the four formal typologies I have detected in his letters to Mantua and Trent: holographs and autograph letters. Delivering a letter signed with the signatory's own hand was a matter of respect; writing a full holograph was a much more significant sign of attachment, because it represented a long and fatiguing task. And indeed, it is no coincidence that Francesco in turn replied to Isabella using his own hand: the consideration she showed had to be—literally—corresponded. Francesco's polite message about Isabella's resorting in future to secretaries suggests that he was couching his relation to her as one of filial (and political?) deference.

Paradoxically, because the act of writing with one's own hand by itself equipped a letter with strong significance, holographs seldom deal with substantial business; rather, they express a wide range of compliments and apologies—a field in which *form* mattered as much as (or even more than) content. Just like the autograph statements of mixed letters, the holographs' primary aim was not conveying a message: the writing *was* the message. Therefore, of the ten holographs preserved in the *Archivio Gonzaga* and in the *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, only two actually focused on specific questions. The first holograph is the one just cited above. Francesco II was compelled to write to Isabella with his own hand to reciprocate her regard. He discussed a mediation for the marchioness he was attempting at the Habsburg court—something that he would have probably delegated to a chancery hand, had he received a standard autograph letter from Mantua. The second holograph is the one I have analysed in discussing the most cogent cases of authorship sharing (above, pp. 174-179): Francesco wrote to Cles with his own hand from Worms to apologise for the homicide committed in Trent by some men of his entourage. But these two episodes aside, the other eight holographs are fairly insubstantial: they contain compliments, apologies, affirmations of affinity, obedience, deference.⁷²

71 ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617, 1522 August 12: 'Illustrissima et Excellentissima Domina mia, Cia et matre observandissima. Ali zorni passati hebe una de Vostra Excellentia che mi fu gratissima, et me rincesse che fusse di propria mane di Vostra Excellentia, perche ley non debe pilgiar tanto fastidio; a me sempre bastara la lettera sua per sotoscripta di mano sua propria.'

72 A brief overview of the holographs to Cles helps clarifying this point. On 21 April 1518, Francesco apologised for having delayed the answer to the prince-bishop, expressed his devotion to him, and quickly recommended a lady Barbara. On 31 March 1519, the duke thanked Cles for his letter and the shipping of some asparagus, expressed his devotion, and apologized for the poor quality of his Latin. On 5 September 1521, the letter began with the apologies for a delay in the answer, then Francesco thanked Cles for his good offices at the Habsburg court, expressed his devotion, and generically asked for further mediation at court. On 4 July 1522, the duke apologized for the delay in the answer, wished he could have seen Cles in person, thanked Cles for the congratulatory letter on the victory in the battle of the Bicocca, professed his obedience, promised to host Cles as soon as the political situation settled, and asked for mediation at the Habsburg court. Finally, on 21 May 1525, Francesco expressed his sorrow for

Hence, contents and handwriting combined to give the letters their meaning. In introducing the holographs at the beginning of this chapter, I observed that Francesco II usually performed them in two situations: when he resumed the interrupted epistolary bond with his correspondent, and when another message (either oral or written) was already going to travel to Mantua or Trent. In both cases, we could say, the primary function of holographs was not informational, but rather representational: the documents were first and foremost a testimony of Francesco's presence.

Therefore, when Francesco II reopened the communication channel with Cles after a period of silence, he wrote with his own hand and implied that this did not happen for a pragmatic reason, but just for the above-mentioned debt (*debito*) of writing. On 21 April 1518, for example, he wrote:

I delayed my answer until now, because I thought I would send a man of mine there at the imperial court; and since I could not send him, I thought I would not have satisfied my *debito* [of writing] if I further waited in replying to the letter of your Most Reverend Lordship, and I confess I made a mistake, and I beg you to forgive me; I did not do it either out of negligence or for any other cause, because I consider your most Reverend Lordship as my most Reverend and most Illustrious Lord.⁷³

With this anxiety, Francesco could never have resorted to a simple autograph letter. The fact that a holograph was meant to actually surrogate the presence of the writer—one of the main functions of the letter as a genre since the times of Cicero and Seneca—⁷⁴is also suggested by a letter to Federico II Gonzaga (1 June 1521), which Francesco wrote personally after the cancellation of a meeting between the two, due to the ongoing military operations of the early 1520s:

‘I thought I would see your Excellence sooner than misfortune willed (...). Since I do not think there will be a chance of being together as soon as I desire, *I wish this [letter] of mine to represent my desire of visiting you*, and I wish to thank you for the great love you always demonstrate to me (...).’⁷⁵

The holograph as a device to materialise Francesco II's presence was perfect for accompanying chancery letters that did not physically feature his unequivocal personal intervention, or for strengthening his intervention if required. In this last respect, the case of 21 May 1525 in the *Corrispondenza Clesiana* is emblematic. The chancery dispatched

the peasant revolt that threatened Trent, and offered his help.

73 ‘(...) ho tardato per fin hora ad responder vedendo mandar un mio li a la Corte Cesarea, et per qualche causa non havendolo io possuto mandar, me he parssso manchar del debito mio a star tanto ad risponder a la lettera de Vostra Signoria Reverendissima, et confesso haver errato, pregandola ad perdonarmi non he processo per negligentia ne per niuna altra causa per che io tengo Vostra Signoria Reverendissima in locho de mio Signor Reverendissimo et Illustrissimo.’

74 Ganz 1997, 282.

75 ‘Io pensavo piu presto che la mala sorte ha voluto poter vedere vostra Excellentia (...) non vedendo occasione che cusi presto como saria el desiderio mio si possiamo trovar insieme, *volio che questa mia facci parte del desiderio mio che de visitar vostra Excellentia*, et ringratiarla del grandissimo amor la me demonstra in omne cosa (...).’ [emphasis added]

a mixed letter to Trent to apologise for the misunderstanding that delayed the mission of Cles's messenger in search of aid to sedate the peasant uprising in Trent's territory (p. 192). Francesco had already acted upon the document, writing an autograph statement to show his actual concern for the situation. However, surprisingly enough, he must have thought that even the addition of his own script at the bottom of the letter was insufficient to justify himself, and eventually resolved to write a separate holograph of excuses. Francesco wrote that he had learned that the peasants were advancing, and that he worried as much as if the uprising was taking place in his own dominion. For this reason, he wrote that he was 'very, very grieved' (*multo multo mi duole*), and invited Cles to use his resources as if they belonged to Cles himself. This message added nothing substantial to the mixed letter it travelled with: its function was only to represent the personal involvement of Francesco more dramatically.

In the case of a *viva voce* bringing an oral message to its intended recipient, the holograph similarly played little informational role, because the substantial part of the same message was evidently in the mouth of the *viva voce* himself. Yet, the holograph could be crucial for embodying the presence and the will of the sender. The *Archivio Gonzaga* preserves two letters of this kind, dated 15 February 1522 and 2 May 1534.⁷⁶ The latter is particularly interesting. Francesco II convinced the Gonzaga resident ambassador in Milan to leave his post and to bring an oral message to marquis Federico II in Mantua. Such decision was quite unusual and drastic, and Francesco apologised in advance: 'I am compelled to ask you to forgive me if I was presumptuous in doing this to your Excellence, and [I ask you to] forgive [the ambassador] if he made a mistake in doing me this service.'⁷⁷ What justified the urgency was a favour Francesco was seeking from the Gonzaga, so important that it would 'greatly please the emperor, as well as Italy as a whole.'⁷⁸ Unfortunately, however, such favour was part of the *oral* message to Federico, so it is impossible to know what it was. As is clear, the situation was exceptional in every regard, and Francesco devised a holograph to reflect it (fig. 5.21, p. 203). The duke adopted a very cursive script and there is practically no trace of *mise-en-page*, but the greeting and the signature are duly shortened, showing that the writer was thinking carefully about the forms he was choosing. The handwriting was so rough readable that a secretary had to 'de-cipher' it, evidently to make it readable to its intended

76 ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1617, Trent, 1522 February 15; b. 1618, Milan, 1534 May 2.

77 '(...) sono constretto pregarla mi perdoni se ho usato troppa presuntione in pigliar tanta sceurta di vostra Excellentia, et a lui se lhavera errato in farmi questo piacere.'

78 '(...) l'imperatore ne sentira grandissimo piacere, il simile tutta Italia.'

recipient. The transcription is still to be found together with the holograph (fig. 5.22, p. 204).

This holograph introduces the last point I would like to tackle before concluding the chapter, the actual readability of the Francesco II's writing performances, a question that deserves a critical approach.

4.4. Presentation Italic and informal Italic: the readability of the duke's handwriting in context

Of the four typologies of letters close that I have listed at the beginning of the chapter, three—chancery letters, autograph letters, and mixed letters—do not show any significant internal difference. Their formal features remain stable, independently from their object and from the circumstances in which they were written. The same cannot be said for holographs. Indeed, even though they were all written by the duke in person, the holographs do not form a unitary group, and can be very different from each other.

The group of the ten holographs could be loosely divided in two sub-sets: there are seven 'formal' holographs (for a specimen, see fig. 5.23, p. 205), and three 'informal' holographs (for a specimen, see fig. 5.24, p. 206). There is undoubtedly a very nuanced middle ground between these two extremes, and the attribution of one document to one sub-set or another is not always easy (for a 'hybrid' case, see fig. 5.25, p. 207). Yet, there are also elements that legitimate a clear division. For example, the differences between the handwritings of the letters belonging to each subset are so evident that, at first glance, one could even doubt they came from the same hand. However, several details suggest that all the letters were written by Francesco II at varying levels of speed and cursivity.⁷⁹ The similarities are thorough in individual letter-forms, such as the 'G's and the 'X's; in the use of the capital 'B' for some words in the middle of a sentence (with the lower bowl always left open); in the abbreviated sign for 'per', and in the shape of the 'C' in words like *corte* (court) and *Cesare* (Caesar) (figg. 5.26–5.45, p. 208).⁸⁰ Therefore, Francesco was able to perform two different scripts; to borrow the terminology of Sara Jayne Steen—who has worked on the letters of Lady Arbella Stuart (1575–1615) and other English noblewomen—the duke could choose between a presentation italic hand and an informal italic hand.⁸¹ However, as we shall soon see, the graphic informality of the second hand

79 Beal 2008,104: 'Script is described as 'cursive' (...) when it shows signs of having been written rapidly with, for instance, the characters hurriedly formed, minimal separate strokes and pen-lifts, linked lettering, loops, and often a pronounced slope to the right.'

80 I wish to thank Professor Marc Smith (École Nationale des Chartes, Paris) and Dr David Rundle (University of Essex) who helped me corroborate the hypothesis that all the holographs were written with the hand of Francesco II.

81 Steen 2001, 57.

1534. 2. maggio Milano
 Ho ricevuto la vostra lettera del 15. di questo mese
 et ho visto il vostro humilissimo et
 suo del 14. di questo et di questo. prima
 sempre et usate hora in questo et di questo
 tanto quanto di questo et di questo
 quanto et in questo et di questo
 Ho la vostra lettera del 15. di questo mese
 sempre et usate hora in questo et di questo
 tanto quanto di questo et di questo
 quanto et in questo et di questo
 Ho la vostra lettera del 15. di questo mese
 sempre et usate hora in questo et di questo
 tanto quanto di questo et di questo
 quanto et in questo et di questo

Fig. 5.21: Holograph in which Francesco II adopted an especially cursive script (ASMn, *Lettere dei Signori di Milano*, 1618, Milan, 1534 May 2)

Ill^{mo} et Ex^{mo} S^{mo} mio obser^{mo}. Venendo a via Ex^{mo} Il X^o
 m^o Jacopo Orator suo ad instantia et preghiera mie, prima
 sono costretto pagarla mi p^oeri se ho usato troppa presunzione
 in pigliar tanta securta di v. Ex^{mo}. Et à Lui si ha uera
 orato in farri questo piacere, Non la fastidio molto col
 mio mal- scrivere. Supplico gli corda come tengo certo v. Ex^{mo}.
 faria à me p^o gratia sua, et mi facci questa gratia à me
 tanto suo scrivere in contentarsi di pigliar questo fastidio,
 che serà mechi alla fine di s^ono contentato, et l'imp^o me
 sentirà gran^{mo} piacere, il simile tutta Italia, et in niuno
 tempo v. Ex^{mo} ne sentirà alcuno obsequio di disturbo. Et
 quanto à me metterò questo obbligo appi fu gli altri obliqui
 gli tengo, et in sua buona f^o di continuo mi sa ce, Da
 Milano alli 2 di Mayo 1537.

De v. Ex^{mo}.

obsequent^{mo} S^{mo} h^o

Jacopo

Fig. 5.22: Late transcription (probably carried out in the seventeenth or eighteenth century) of the holograph seen in the previous page (fig. 5.21)

78
21 apr 1518
14

Per me et Ill^{me} S^{re} mi dixer^{me}. receuete una
di v^s R^{ma} za qualche di passati a la qual
ho tardato p^o fin hora ad responder cedendo
mandar un mio li a la Corte Ces^a et p^o
qualche causa no hauendolo in possuto
mandar: me he parso manchar del
debito mio a star tanto ad responder
a la tua de v^s R^{ma} et confesso hauer
errato pregandola ad perdonarmi no he
processo p^o negligentia ne p^o nuna altra causa
p^o che in tempo v^s R^{ma} fu locho di mio
S^{re} R^{mo} et Ill^{mo}.

Ringrazio v^s R^{ma} di tanta humanita et fatica
pregata p^o mi suo Bon S^{re} in remandar le
Cose mie a la Ces^a di tu et quella ha fatto
l'officio del non S^{re} verso el suo S^{re} et

Fig. 5.23: Example of formal holograph (ASTn, Corrispondenza Clesiana, V, 10, Trent, 1518 April 21)



Fig. 5.26-5.45: Details of single letters/marks coming from five different letters, demonstrating that they were all holographs written by the same hand—that of Francesco II. From left to right, the letters belong to ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, (i) Trent, 1519 March 31 ('formal' holograph); (ii) Trent, 1518 April 19 ('formal' holograph); (iii) Feldkirch, 1521 September 5 ('hybrid' holograph); (iv) Milan, 1525 May 21 ('informal' holograph); (v) Monza, 1522 July 4 ('informal' holograph). There is a series of 'G's in the first line; of 'X's in the second line; of capital 'B's with the lower bowl left open in the third line; of abbreviated signs for 'per' in the fourth line; of words containing the letters 'co' (*corte*, *cose*) in the fourth line

1519
16

R^{me} et Ill^{me} d^{ne} d^{ne} mi obisset^{me} litteras R^{me} d^v
 accepi que fuerunt mi gratissime gratias imortales
 sibi ago de illis Asparagis que degnata est mihi
 transmutere et ob amorem d^v R^{me} libentissime fruar
 que ad nova de quibus degnata est solita sua humanitate
 R^{me} d^v redere me certiore pariter sibi grās ago
 cum ex eis maxime letatus sum quia multis ex causis
 nihil aliud desidero quam exaltationem et honorem
 chatoliti Regis tui tri et ita di faciant ut omnia
 sue mai^{ri} ad vota succedant

Secretiora vero que d^v R^{me} noluit credere litteris pruden^{me}
 fecit et pro certo sciat R^{me} d^v illa intellegere mihi
 gratissimum erit quando ey placuerit et eam humilite
 rogo ut habeat me in locum sui Boni et devoti servitor
 et in Bona gratia R^{me} d^v humillime me comendo
 Si forssan caput perspici fuisset factum in his scribenhis
 no mihi imputet sed gymnasium veni qui tale hominem
 doctum edidit et forum me R^{me} d^v comendo incedenti
 Anna marcij: 517
 R^{me} et Ill^{me} d^{ne} d^{ne} me
 ad vota R^{me} d^v
 transfor^a

Fig. 5.46: Latin holograph of Francesco II (ASTn, Corrispondenza Clesiana, V, 10, Trent, 1519 March 31)

was administered so strategically that it can be considered very formal as well.

Moreover, it is possible to look at the elements proper of the *billet* style to claim that the more formal documents were written without employing a secretary. Indeed, many letters have the salutation formulae and the signatures shortened, and Francesco II always uses the first singular person. What distinguishes the formal and the informal subset is also the accuracy of the letters' mise-en-page. The writing of formal holographs was organised in some clearly delimited thematic paragraphs, and the margins recalled those of proper chancery/autograph letters (again, see fig. 5.23, p. 205). By contrast, informal holographs show neither clear margins, nor interior intervals and paragraphs, and the text inevitably had a less coherent flow (fig. 5.24, p. 206). What motivated these evident differences in the aspect of the documents? Arguably, the quality and readability of the holographs was strictly connected to their dual function as medium and message.

I maintained above (p. 199) that holographs seldom dealt with substantial business, because their performance was more significant than their content. Yet, however insubstantial his messages may have been, Francesco II had nonetheless to make himself understood, and wrote in a readable manner, executing 'formal' holographs. The necessity of being comprehensible strongly diminished when the holographs integrated other messages (either written or oral) travelling to Mantua and Trent. In these last cases, the letters really became little more than a graphic manifestation of Francesco's presence, and their extreme informality was functional, because it represented emotionality, conviction, contact. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the three holographs belonging to the 'informal' group were all delivered together with other messages. Once again, a situation that seems to be the result of inexperience and precipitation reveals itself as a calculated formal strategy.

Francesco II's awareness in terms of formal strategies does not only emerge when he deliberately used his self-defined 'bad' script (*mal scripta, mal scrivere*), but also when he decided to boast his most beautiful version of letter-writing. A holograph addressed to Cles on 31 March 1519 is a case in point for discussing this question. Young Francesco, then still an exile sheltered in Trent, wrote with his own hand to Cles. In the first paragraph, Francesco gave 'immortal thanks' (*gratias immortales*) for a batch of asparagus Cles sent him as gift; in the second paragraph, he thanked Cles for the news received from the court of Ferdinand I of Habsburg; then, he recommended himself to Cles. Hence, as usual, the message was of little relevance. However, Francesco curiously decided to write it in Latin. What is interesting here is how this choice had an impact on

the holograph's form, which automatically became as polished as Francesco could accomplish (fig. 5.46, p. 209). The handwriting is remarkably legible for his standards, and the mise-en-page is also very accurate: we find a clear left margin, plus four well defined paragraphs, each one with the first line protruding to the left, which allows the initial letter to be capitalised. This refined graphics is evidently well studied, but there is a problem: the duke's Latin is rather crude, and—as anticipated earlier in the chapter—the letter is one of those ending with the incorrect formula *ad vita servitor*, with the missing final 'm' in the word *vita*. What was the point of making such an effort to write beautifully, if the writer was unable to support his attention to detail with decent grammar? Francesco was perfectly conscious of this contradiction. Indeed, he concluded the letter with a peculiar statement: 'if the head of the Persian was broken because of this writing do not impute it to me, but to the University of Wien, which raised such a learned man (...).'⁸² Although I can only guess the meaning of the metaphor that opens this affirmation, it is clear that Francesco was being ironic about his own Latin.⁸³ Therefore, the clash between graphic accurateness and grammatical clumsiness was in fact a desired effect; possibly, it was a way to joke about a history of personal scholastic unfulfillment that Cles would have known well because of his past role as mentor to Francesco. This hypothesis matches the argument of historian of pedagogy Monica Ferrari, who has shown that letter-writing became a pillar of courtly education during the fifteenth century, and that the Sforza court was at the forefront of this trend; writing *manu propria* and composing letters in Latin—as well as learning the notion of *debito* of writing—were all fundamental steps in a princely pedagogic program.⁸⁴ The mention of Wien is also very interesting, because no biography of Francesco suggests that he was there with Cles and had contacts with Wien's university. But besides this, the holograph works as a final example of how a 'banal' message could be formally manipulated to become exceptionally meaningful as a reaffirmation of close connection.

This chapter began with two series—'Letters of the Lords of Milan to the Gonzaga' in the *Archivio Gonzaga* and 'Letters of Sovereign and Princes' in the *Corrispondenza Clesiana*—whose name propounds a very individualised and never-changing idea of letters

82 ASTn, *Corrispondenza Clesiana*, V, 10, Trent, 1519 March 31: 'Si forssan caput Perssiani fuisset fractum in his scribentis no mihi imputet, sed gemnasium Wenn[ensis], qui tale hominem doctum edidit, et iterum me Reverendissime Domine Vostre comendo.'

83 I checked one of the most consulted collections of classical proverbs and figures of speech (Otto 1890) in order to find useful clues, but with no results.

84 Ferrari and Piseri 2015, especially 431-434. See also Ferrari 2000, Ead. 2009.

authorship; and with a scholar (Renato Tisot) who showed little consideration for the varying forms of the correspondence between Francesco II and Bernardo Cles, being preoccupied only by its contents. Together they formed an unrealistically static scenario, especially considering the complexity of chancery practices that has emerged throughout the second part of this thesis. My research question, then, was whether carrying out a material analysis of the letters could help fashion a more coherent and convincing interpretation of them. We can now conclude in the affirmative. A critique of the different formal features of the two correspondences, based on the approach of what I have defined as 'new' diplomatics, has disclosed a meaningful and detailed taxonomy of Sforza letters close—one that should affect the way in which we read and interpret the letters themselves.

I have identified four different typologies of letters close in the *Archivio Gonzaga* and in the *Corrispondenza Clesiana*: chancery letters, autograph letters, mixed letters, and holographs. Each typology results from the continuous tension between two opposing trends: a trend of authorship sharing, resulting in the collective occupation of ducal identity through chancery mediation; and a trend of authorship re-appropriation, consisting in a range of very codified strategies of autography through which Francesco II channelled his personal presence in the letters bearing his name.

The analysis of authorship sharing has a strong political value, and a huge impact on the very status of chancery and autograph letters. Indeed, if we look at these documents in light of the process that brought to their creation, we realise that Francesco II's contribution was minimal (if any,) and that the chancery could manage state affairs in a highly discretionary way. In addition, two cogent cases of authorship negotiation surfacing from Mantua and Trent make the collectivisation of chancery and autograph letters both deeper and absolutely systematic. In the first case, we have seen that the Senate chancery wrote letters adopting the ducal authorship and simulating Francesco's *personal* rhetorical motives, even though the Senate had its own jurisdiction, separate from (and, as we shall see in Chapter 7, sometimes conflicting with) that of the Sforza. In the second case, we have seen that Francesco's chancery dispatched letters from Trent not only imitating his authorship, but also bearing his autograph signature, even though the duke was elsewhere. For these reasons, we must conclude that Francesco's authorship was extended to include a plurality of voices, despite the apparent individuality of the letters.

The analysis of autography strategies, for its part, helps explore the strong representational character of the written word, and the outstanding form-awareness of

early modern letter writers. Francesco II knew that his actual presence behind the letters bearing his own name was not considered automatic: the 'period eye' of sixteenth-century recipients must have been well trained to recognise which letters were collective and which were individual. For this reason, Francesco could count on a system of autograph interventions to signal a more or less strong involvement in the making of a letter. The simplest layer of personalisation was the autograph signature. This device was probably more symbolic than functional, but it was nonetheless an important sign of respect, as Francesco himself overtly pointed out in his dramatic last letter to Cles (p. 181) and in asking Isabella d'Este to just sign her letters to him, without writing them in full with her own hand (pp. 198-199). The second and third layer of personalisation were the autograph statement in mixed letters and the holograph. We have seen many reasons for their use, but I wish to highlight here two additional points that have emerged. The first is that mixed letters and holographs, despite their apparent spontaneity, were as formal and codified as chancery and autograph letters, even though they adhered to a different kind of code. We have seen how autograph statements always determined the disappearance of secretarial signatures, and how holographs followed a set of rules that caused the simplification of the protocol and of the ducal signature, with the addition of some recurrent formulaic expressions. The second point is that the meaning of both autograph statements and holographs stood as much in the act of writing as in their contents. Francesco wrote with his own hand because he wished to manifest his presence graphically. His letters constituted a kind of performance

Finally, beyond improving our understanding of the documents themselves, the material reading of Francesco II's letters enriches our knowledge and interpretation of the relationship between the correspondents. As far as the Sforza-Gonzaga axis is concerned, we have appreciated how the epistolary *persona ficta* of the duke channelled a widespread diplomatic and administrative web of exchanges between Milanese and Mantuan institutions, communities, and notables. Moreover, we have seen how Francesco—when in control of his epistolary self—made a great effort to nurture an intense relationship with his aunt Isabella d'Este, whose presence at the Gonzaga court he regarded at least as influential as that of her son, marquis Federico II. This attitude of Francesco confirms Isabella's reputation as one of the most powerful women of the Italian Renaissance. Generally speaking, the 'graphic deference' Francesco repeatedly reserved to Isabella and Federico—by means of holographs and autograph statements—signals that he realistically considered himself as the lesser part in the political alliance with the

Gonzaga, and acted accordingly. However, all this does not bear comparison with the almost maniacal epistolary care Francesco devoted to his former mentor and protector Bernardo Cles. Until now, scholars have inferred the unique relationship between Francesco and Cles from the contents and the tone of their correspondence—something that, as we have seen (especially in Chapter 4), can be largely misleading. My material analysis of the letters, by contrast, provides a more solid ground to claim that Francesco actually saw Cles as a key-figure in his life—so much so that the duke *never* failed to dispatch to Trent letters bearing at least one autograph mark, until the very last moments of his life.

Now, it is time to turn to Sforza letters patent, and to verify whether we can apply a similar method of analysis to this further documentary typology.

Chapter 6 – Letters patent

1. De-contextualised documents: modern archives of letters patent

Unlike letters close, letters patent were dispositive documents: their issue established a juridical act. Obtaining, holding or producing letters patent was the most effective way to support a vast array of claims. Should not the production of letters patent be even more disputed than that of letters close then? Can we expect this disputed production to put the declared authorship of letters patent into question?

Yet, historians and archivists generally treat letters patent unproblematically, as the most imperative expression of sovereign authority. This happens for two strictly connected reasons. Firstly, because historians readily accept the basic narrative of the final *content* of letters as a political reality. In a letter patent, an author/authority (in the case of this thesis, duke Francesco II) invariably grants/authorises/orders something (the object of the juridical act) to someone (the recipient), thus showing his power. And secondly, because historians accept the final *form* of the letters patent, which matches the idea of authority conveyed by their content. Indeed, letters patent normally bear all the marks of authority, as they show huge signatures and seals, coat-of-arms, an outstanding size, fine writing materials.

This formal factor may seem secondary, but it is precisely the material aspect of letters patent that has often gave rise to a special regard for their preservation. Between the late-eighteenth- and the early-twentieth century, for example, letters patent were often selected for transfer into some special archival collections. In the Italian State Archives, these collections were typically named *fondi diplomatici* —'archives of diplomas,' for example in Florence, Lucca, Perugia, Pisa.⁸⁵ In Milan's State Archives, as seen in the general introduction (pp. 39-40), the arbitrary creation of special collections was common practice throughout the nineteenth century. The huge *Diplomatico* archive is a result of such effort. It is composed of a number of series, which mostly gather loose documents selected from pre-existing archives using different criteria.⁸⁶

One of the series of the *Diplomatico* is named *Diplomi e Dispacci Sovrani* ('Sovereign Diplomas and Dispatches,' henceforward *DDS*) and gathers a selection of individually-filed documents, most of them letters patent, sorted in series by geographic provenance (Germany, Spain, Milan, Mantua, Tuscany, and Venice) and further classified

85 Florence: *GGAS*, vol. 2, 32-38; Lucca: *Ibid.*, 584-587; Perugia: *GGAS*, vol. 3 (1986), 484-485; Pisa: *Ibid.*, 646-649.

86 For the full list of series of the *Diplomatico*, see *GGAS*, vol. 2, 893.

by author—the sovereign whose name opens the document. Hence, the researcher who wishes to see some of the most spectacular Sforza letters patent has to request a folder of the *Milano* series from the *DDS*, and is then seated at a special isolated table to examine the evidence. In this way, the archival and historical de-contextualisation of the documents is particularly pronounced. Textual objects that were produced and used in dynamic situations are now presented as a perfectly ordered series of documentary specimens.

The modes of sampling and classification of letters patent employed to create the *Diplomatico* strongly influence the kind of research that may be conducted on the evidence it preserves. On one hand, these modes imply the letters patent' solemnisation, which has often promoted their edition.⁸⁷ The edition of letters patent (and of documents in general) is valid and useful for some scholarly purposes, especially when it comes with an accurate index of names, places, and things. However, the edition of documents is also very limiting insofar as it tends to propose the positivist equation *document=text*, according to which it is possible to effectively render the meaning of a charter in a transcription and in a summary containing the author, the recipient and the object of a juridical act. However, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, some important layers of meaning were conveyed through the physical and paratextual features of the documents: editions fail consider these decisive complexities.

On the other hand, the same modes of sampling and preservation of letters patent have encouraged their diplomatic analysis: I have already discussed advantages and limits of diplomatics as a tool of scholarly inquiry (pp. 16-17, and again pp. 150-151). I have pointed out that classic diplomatics rightly considers the authority emanating from documents as originating from the juxtaposition of many different elements, each one encapsulating meaning; but I have also stressed the need to reflect critically on the activity and process that led to that juxtaposition, something diplomatics does not take into account—in line with its strictly descriptive nature.

2. Re-contextualising documents: the 'make up' and the 'making ' of Sforza letters patent

To begin such critical reflection, we need to go back to Jacques Le Goff's definition of document as *montaggio*, an Italian word I have translated with 'assemblage.' As discussed in the introduction (p. 23-25), Le Goff used the word *assemblage* to indicate documents

⁸⁷ Not for nothing, a series of the *Diplomatico* was called *Museo Diplomatico*. For editions, see for example the series of 21 volumes entitled *Pergamene milanesi dei secoli XII-XIII*, mostly drawn from the *Diplomatico*, published between 1984 and 2008 by the Università Statale of Milan

as finished products, as well as the process of construction that led to their creation. Conceiving documents as both a product *and* a process is the key to carry out a material analysis of letters patent overcoming the limits of classic diplomatics. Firstly, I will focus on documents as assemblages in the sense that I will approach the finished letters patent as documents/monuments, i.e. as textual objects that aim at conveying a precise image of themselves and their authors—the image Le Goff defines as *travestimento* ('camouflage') and *apparenza ingannevole* ('deceptive appearance').⁸⁸ Secondly, I will try to de-construct the assemblage that led to the letters patent' production, in order to verify whether the conditions in which the 'documents/monuments' were created actually match the image of authority they aim at conveying. This approach—more interpretive than descriptive, and sensitive to the political, social and material reality of document-making—represents what I have defined as new diplomatics.

In this context, continuing to use the term 'assemblage' to define the document-as-product and the document-as-process would be confusing, and it is better to separate the two aspects. For this reason, I will define the final aspect of letters patent as their 'make-up,' and the process of their production as their 'making-of.' The aim of this chapter is to analyse both make-up and making-of of a corpus of letters patent produced by the chancery of Francesco II.⁸⁹

Section 3 analyses the make-up of letters patent. First, I will ask what kind of implicit political discourse they aim at conveying, and how. What makes them looking so authoritative? In addition, I will highlight how the uniformity of the juridical value of letters patent conflicts with the great variety of their forms. How should we interpret this mismatch?

Turning to the making of letters patent in section 4, I will take advantage of a unique opportunity offered by folder n. 13 of the *DDS*. The folder preserves eight *incomplete* letters patent, which Francesco II's chancery began to produce but did not finish. The preservation of incomplete documents in a 'showcase' series such as the *DDS* deserves some general considerations (4.1). But more importantly, these letters patent—like the one I have begun this thesis with, the Taverna charter (pp. 11-14)—allow us to

⁸⁸ Le Goff 1978, 46.

⁸⁹ The corpus corresponds to folder n. 13 of the *Milano* sub-series in the *DDS*—thirty-six documents—but I will also use 21 one document coming from a similar collection preserved in Milan's Municipal Historical Archives, called *Cimeli* ('Memorabilia'). Since the documents I am going to refer to always belong to the same folder of their series/fond, I will use only the name of the series/fond to which they belong plus their file number in order to identify them. For example: ASMi, *Diplomatico, Diplomi e Dispacci Sovrani, Milano*, folder 13, file 83 is abbreviated in *DDS* 83; ASCMi, *Cimeli*, folder 11, file 60 is abbreviated in *Cimeli* 60.

grasp the background of documentary production, thus enabling an interesting set of questions. Does the *corroboratio*—the clause that announces the actions that have been taken to validate the document—always describe the actual process of authentication of letters patent)? What was the real value of the elements that signified ducal authority, such as Francesco's signature and his seal? Was there a standard procedure for creating a document, or was such procedure unregulated? What was the role of illumination, the element that more than anything else transformed letters patent in striking emblems of authority? The answers to all these questions will help change our perspective on the compact and authoritative nature of letters patent we have started from.

3. The make-up of Sforza letters patent

3.1. letters patent as 'documents-monuments'

Historians and archivists have accepted the basic narrative encapsulated in the content as well as in the form of letters patent. It is a narrative of unchallenged, top-down authority. These documents 'speak' as if their sole author was the duke, acting out of his will and power. Even the standard definition of letter patent in the *Vocabulaire International de la Diplomatie* has accepted this point, highlighting that a letter patent was produced to record 'a decision made [by an authority] (...) following its own will.' (see above, p. 16). Using Le Goff's illuminating vocabulary, we can say that historians and archivists are passive before the make-up of these documents/monuments.

If the objective is to de-construct the monumentality of the documents, then it is first of all important to understand how this monumentality was constructed. In order to do so, we have to turn to the diplomatics of letters patent. Their authoritativeness was the result of an assemblage of features—the document's make-up—which, in the vocabulary of diplomatics, are defined as 'internal' when they relate directly to its textual contents, and as 'external' when they are purely material and (supposedly) independent from them (for more information, see also Glossary 1, p. 326).⁹⁰

Let us begin by looking at the internal diplomatic features of letters patent. The ensemble of their textual contents is called *tenor*, and consists of protocol, text, and eschatocol. Firstly, the protocol is the opening part of the letter patent. It has a clear intitulation unmistakably identifying Francesco II as the author of the juridical act (*intitulatio*). The name of the duke is often written in capital letters, and is bigger than the rest of the *tenor*'s words, so that it clearly stands out as one of the most important

90 *VID*, 51 and 45.

elements of the document.

Secondly, in the text, the language used is nearly always Latin, the language of authority par excellence. There is only one exception in my corpus, a letter patent granting a Genoese merchant the right to export corn outside the Duchy of Milan (*DDS* 85). The monumentality of Latin is particularly imposing if the documents were issued following a petition written in vernacular: indeed, the petition was often transcribed into the text, thus creating a visually sharp linguistic contrast with the solemn Latin formulae surrounding it. Moreover, the fundamental statement manifesting the will of the authority and originating the juridical act (dispositive clause, or *dispositio*) is always expressed through first-person verbs (*ordinamus*, *decernimus*, *statuimus*, and so forth) suggesting the strong individual agency of the duke—as in the case of chancery and autograph letters close. Such personalisation is furthered by a final statement of the text describing the actions taken to authenticate the document: such statement (called clause of corroboration, or *corroboratio*) invariably identifies Francesco II as the one who personally ordered the creation of the letter patent (*jussio*), as well as its registration and sealing.

Finally, it was in the last part of the document, the eschatocol, that the chancery put the strongest effort to accomplish an effect of authoritativeness. Here, we begin to pass from the internal to the external documentary features. A large portion of the letter patent—typically from one third to half of its total surface—was normally left blank to host the huge signature and the seal of the duke, clearly directing the attention of present and future readers to these symbols of ducal authority (fig. 6.1, p. 221). By contrast, the other clerical signatures—those of the *Gran Cancelliere* and of one secretary—found place on the bottom-left and bottom-right corner of the document respectively, as marginal features. The seal could be impressed on the document's surface, or pendant. In the latter case, it was a spectacular device that alone turned the letter patent into a monument (fig. 6.2, p. 222).

As is clear from this description, an arsenal of textual elements was purposefully arranged to express a simple and direct political declaration transcending the particular object of the single letter patent: the duke is the only source of power, the duke acts out of his own exclusive will. Additional external features could physically design the idea of authority. Illumination, for example, when present, made letters patent something to look at, and not only to read. Size and writing material—the two most basic characteristic of the document-as-object—were also significant. letters patent are often of outstanding

size, and they are made of precious parchment, or of high-quality paper, later known in Milan as *carta da patente* ('letter-patent paper.')

⁹¹

3.2. *Non-standard monuments*

Once it is clear that letters patent were explicitly meant to become documents/monuments from the moment of their creation, we can overcome our passivity in response to their make-up, thus starting to scrutinise their form. From this point of view, one first element to approach critically is the lack of standardisation of the evidence preserved in the Sforza corpus. Indeed, the aspect of the letters patent varies greatly, although they all define themselves as *litterae*, and although they all ultimately served the same function—sanctioning a juridical act.

To realise the remarkable formal variety of Sforza letters patent, it is first of all necessary to analyse their aspect when they present themselves in their lowest and highest scale of solemnity. In order to do so, I have identified two models of letters patent, and I have labelled them as 'simple letter patent' and as 'diploma' respectively—the use of the term 'diploma' being suggested from the name of the *DDS* collection (*Diplomi e Dispacci Sovrani*). On the one hand, the least solemn simple letters patent are made of paper; their size tends to be standardised, and to coincide with that of the bifoliums used for letters close, but the text is arranged horizontally, following the long side of the page; the signs of authentication used are the autograph signature of the duke, his impressed seal and the signatures of the *Gran Cancelliere* and of one secretary. Simple letters patent are not illuminated (fig. 6.3, p. 223). On the other hand, the most solemn diplomas are made of parchment; their size is bigger than those of the diplomatic bifoliums, and varies considerably from charter to charter; like simple letters patent, diplomas bear the autograph signature of Francesco, but the seal is pendant; a *plica* (turn up) is typically made at their bottom, to reinforce the parchment to which the seal is tied; the signatures of the secretaries are therefore normally hidden under the *plica*; diplomas may be illuminated (fig. 6.4, p. 224).

Although roughly one-fourth of the documents in the corpus I am analysing represent simple letters patent, and there are six charters that can be defined as diplomas, what emerges from the corpus is precisely that the great majority of the documents *do not* correspond to the two models outlined above. Documents showing the authenticating elements of simple letters patent (autograph signature of the duke and impressed seal)

⁹¹ See for example the late-sixteenth-century orders of purchase to stationers contained in ASMi, *Diplomatico, Miscellanea Storica*, 66, 1580 July 26.

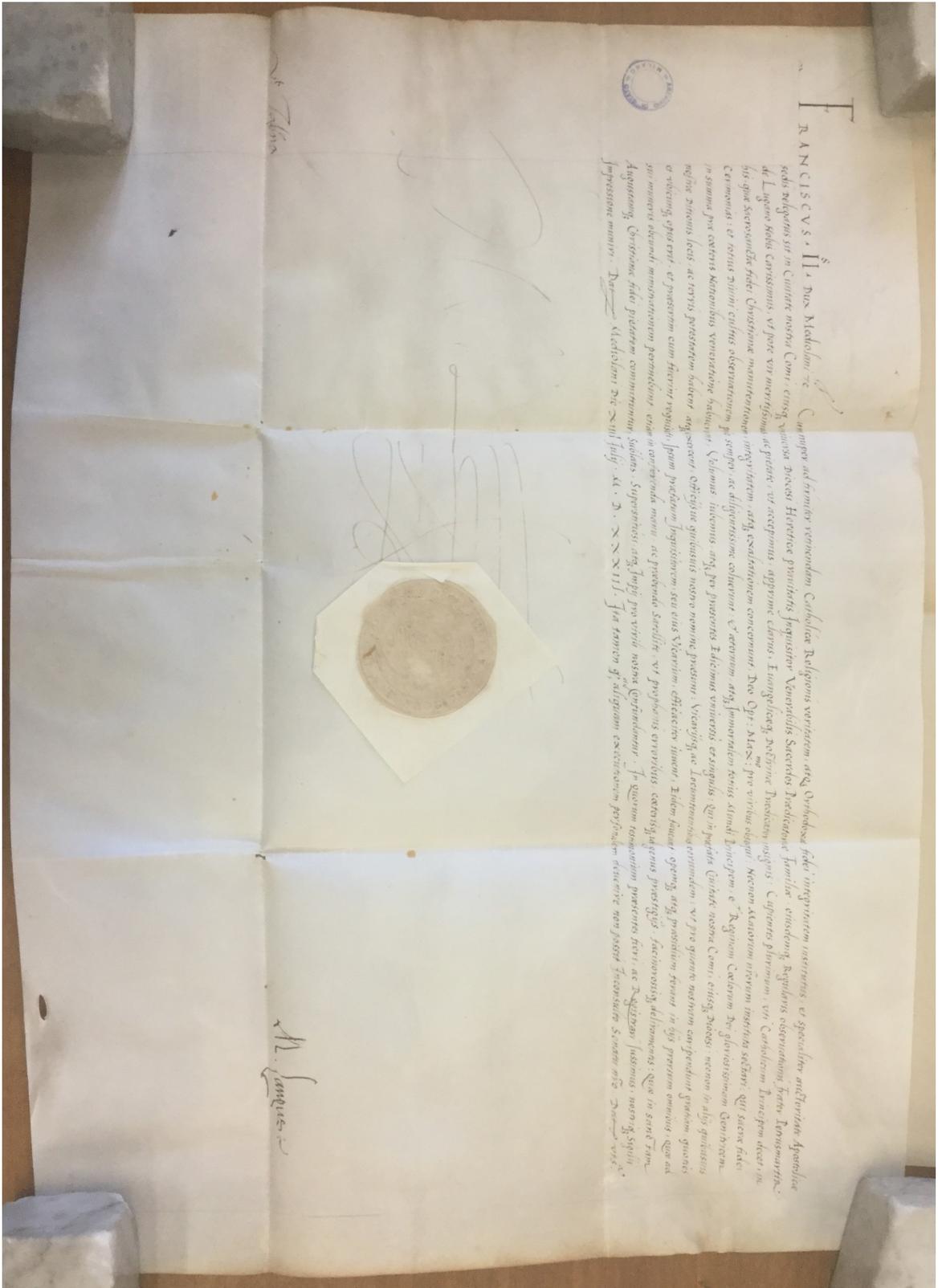


Fig. 6.1: DDS 69, with a large space left blank for hosting the eschatocol



Fig. 6.2: Brass box containing the pendant seal of *Cimeli* 60, decorated with the Sforza coat-of-arms sided by the emblem of the buckets and burning logs

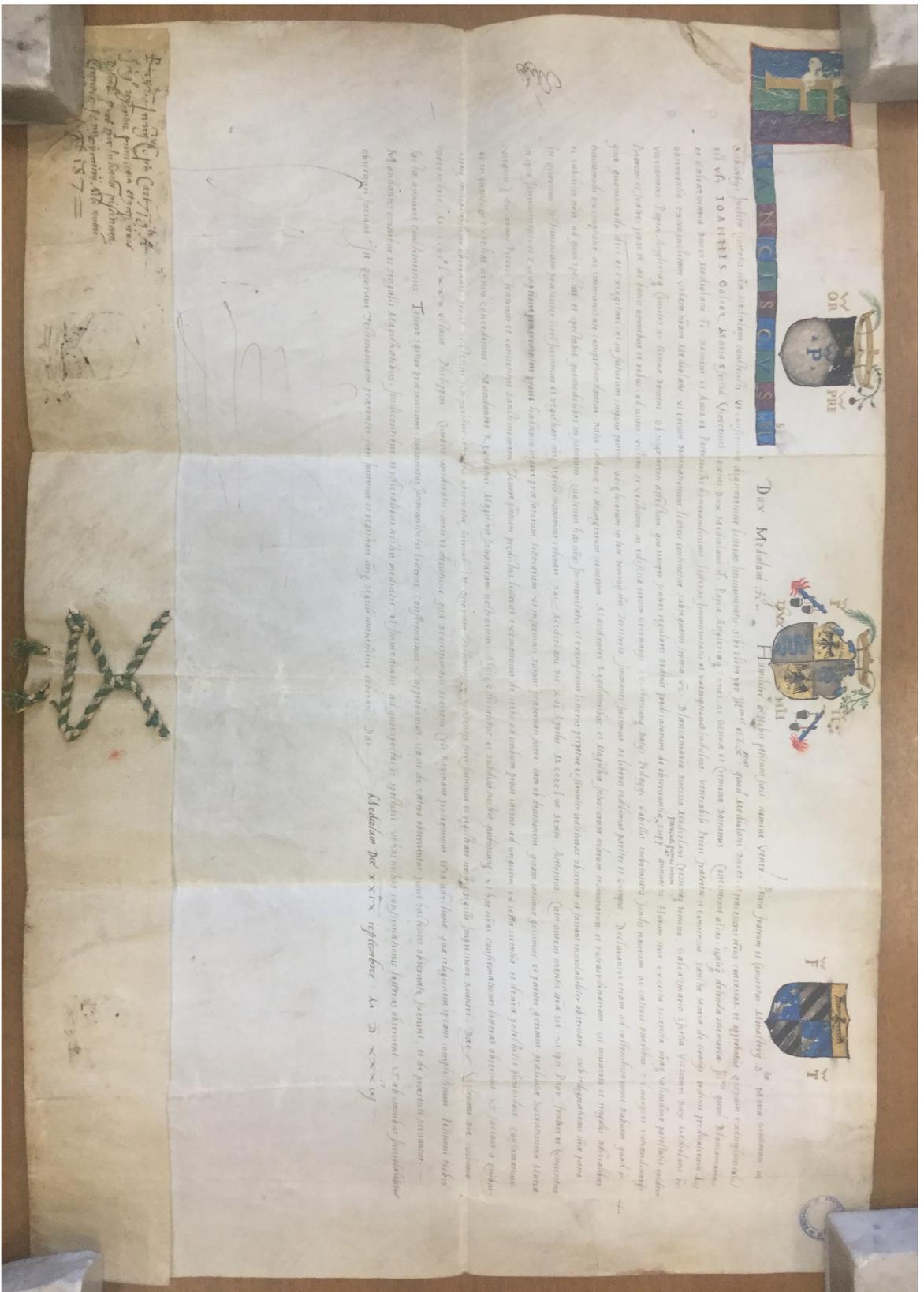


Fig. 6.4: Typical example of 'diploma' (DDS 70). Unfortunately, the pendant seal is lost

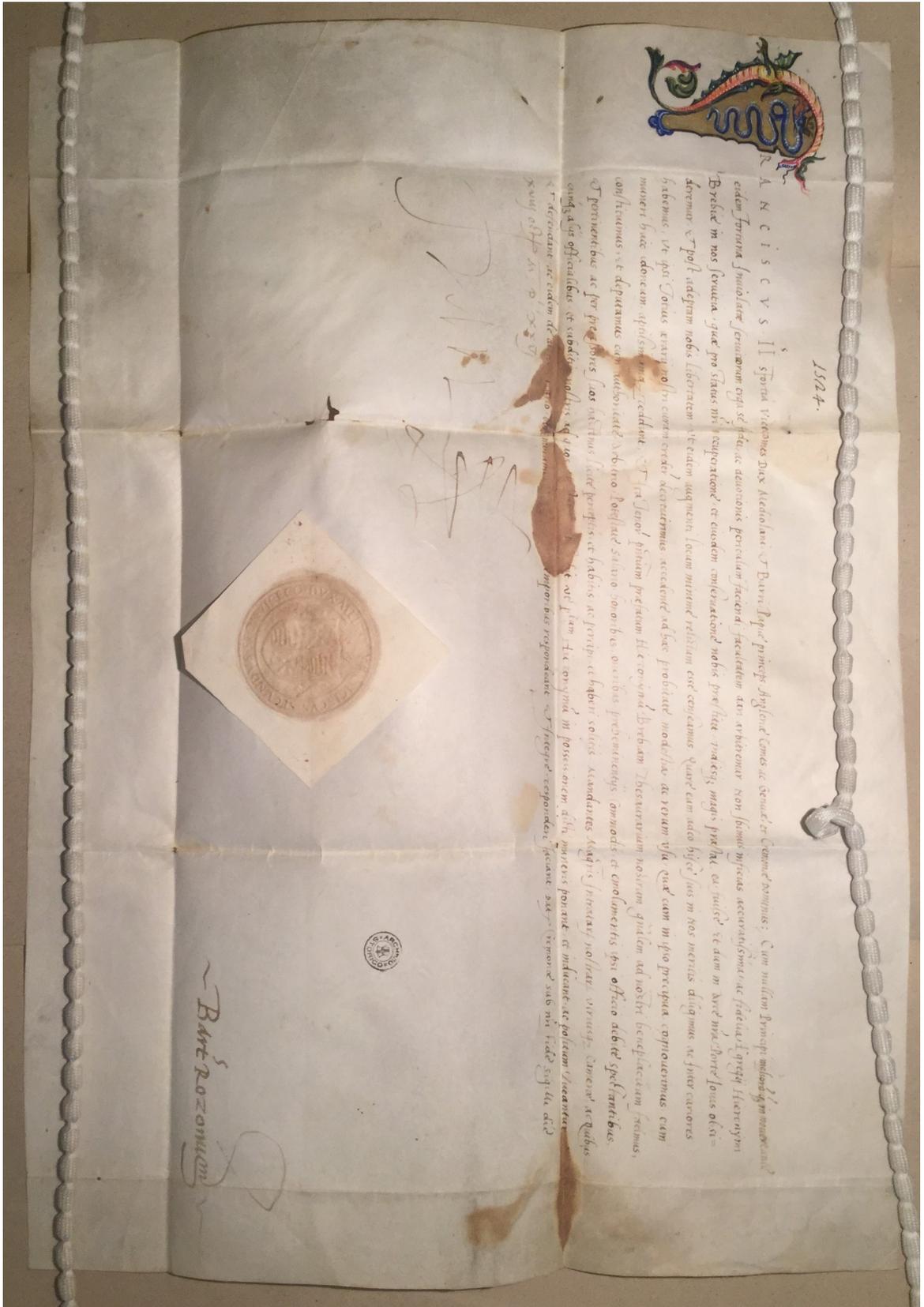


Fig. 6.5: Example of 'hybrid' letter patent (*Cimeli 18*). The charter has an impressed seal (typical feature of simple letters patent,) but is made of parchment and illuminated (typical features of diplomas)

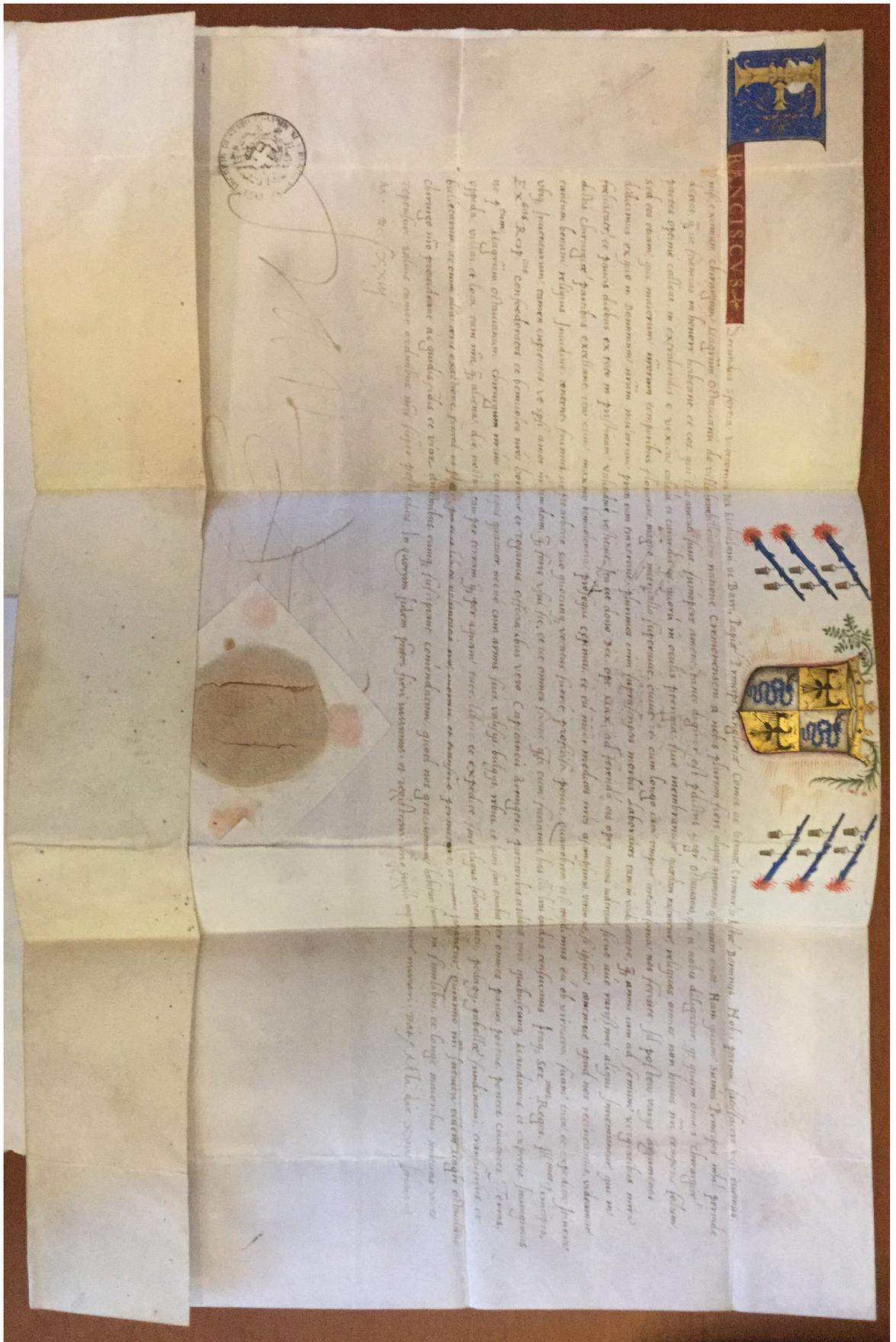


Fig. 6.6: Another example of 'hybrid' letter patent (*DDS 8*), with the typical features of a diploma (parchment, illumination, *plica*), but featuring impressed seal instead of a pendant one.

can often be found in parchment, instead of paper, and of a bigger size than a letter close, or even with a little miniature (fig. 6.5, p. 225); conversely, documents with the aspect of a diploma (outstanding size, with *plica*, illuminated,) rather than a pendant seal, can bear an impressed one (fig. 6.6, p. 226). Therefore, the features strictly defining simple letters patent and diplomas are only two: if documents are made of paper, they have to be considered simple letters patent, because they will necessarily lack illumination and pendant seal; if documents have a pendant seal, they have to be considered diplomas, and will be necessarily made of parchment. All the other combinations of features result in 'hybrid' documents, which represent the rule (and not the exception,) and form a nuanced middle ground between the two models.

To my knowledge, this evident variety has never been object of specific reflection. However, analysing it is fundamental. Indeed, the very fact that the chancery did not standardise its production and rank it into a simple hierarchy of few well-defined archetypes demonstrates that the making of letters patent was characterised by a series of careful choices on the material forms to adopt, which in turn implies that those forms were highly meaningful, and cannot be dismissed as secondary and unimportant. As a consequence, letters patent are brought into Renaissance material culture *as physical objects*, and not only as abstract texts. They become part of a 'material world' that, as Ulinka Rublack points out,

can only properly be understood through an engagement with 'actual products': 'how they were designed and made' and 'what they were used for'. This is all the more important since many Renaissance artefacts gained their significance and attractiveness by drawing attention to the features of their matter and to the crafting skills involved in their creation.⁹²

In other words, an overall view on Sforza chancery production, combined with material-culture theory, clearly suggests that we should not limit ourselves to reading the textual content of documents—especially letters patent, the 'most conspicuously material' documents of all. We must consider their making and their handling in order to understand them fully. In addition, the physical aspect of documents clearly changed with the socio-political context of their creation, and the forms that material-culture studies treat as meaningful here obtain a distinctively political significance. The make-up of a letter patent was dependent on the kind of juridical act it recorded, and, crucially, on the standing of the recipient, and on the relationship in force between him/her and the letter's author.⁹³ In this sense, letters patent represented an object whose design was not

92 Rublack 2013, 43.

93 An interesting example to corroborate this argument is that of the Italian jesuit missionary Alessandro Valignano (1539–1609), who carefully described the material features of the papal letters he wanted to

commanded only by the duke and his chancery, but also by the recipient. I analyse three specific examples of such situation in this chapter (pp. 254-256); more generally, as we shall see, investigating the procedures involving the illumination of letters patent is especially useful to understand their inherently dynamic and 'social' nature.

Considering the context and recipient of a letter patent—and not only their official author—as substantial factors in its making is a first step in de-constructing the studiedly authoritative image of these documents. If the power of Francesco II was as undisputed as letters patent tried to convey with their internal and external features, then why were the same letters patent so changeable in their material form? As in the case of letters close, taking the authorship and the narrative of letters patent at face value is misleading. Following Le Goff's recommendation, we should make an effort to disassemble the construction of these documents. In this way, the focus shifts from the make-up of letters patent to their making of.

4. The making of Sforza letters patent

4.1. Eight unfinished Sforza letters patent: a key to 'unlock' documents/monuments

The importance of interpreting documents in terms of process rather than final form has been one of the mainstays of this thesis. As far as letters close are concerned, the task was relatively easy: with the possible exception of the duke's signature, the content of the letters close was written from top to bottom (then the address on the outside of the letter) and the alternation of different scripts shows who acted upon the letter at any given stage. By contrast, letters patent are much more difficult to de-construct: their monumental make-up is very compact. The text is written by one hand only, without any correction or addition—except for the date, which could be added by a different hand—and there is no intuitive order of apposition for all the other authenticating or decorative parts: illumination, ducal and secretarial signatures, ducal seal, notes of registration could all precede or succeed each other.

Fortunately, however, the *DDS* series offers a key to 'unlock' these documents, because it preserves eight undated and unregistered documents (*DDS* 83, 85, 86, 88-92, figg. 6.7-6.14, pp. 230-237). The chancery could not dispatch any act as important as a letter patent without the place and date of issue, and registration notes for future

be delivered to the Japanese Emperor and his provincial governors. Valignano wanted the letters to the Emperor to be much more magnificent to those directed to the governors, in order to respectfully reflect political hierarchies. See Laven 2011, 91.

Chart 1 – Features of the eight unfinished letter patents of the DDS

	Ref.	Starting words	Typology	Has:	Lacks:
1	DDS 83	<i>Supplicanter Nobis</i>	Simple letter patent	Initial 'F' of 'Franciscus' Francesco's signature	<i>Corroboratio</i> Seal Secretarial signatures Date Registration notes
2	DDS 85	<i>Volendo Noi</i>	Simple letter patent	Initial 'F' of 'Franciscus' <i>Corroboratio</i> Francesco's signature Seal Secretarial signatures	Date Registration notes
3	DDS 86	<i>Potentibus Humiliter</i>	Simple letter patent	Initial 'F' of 'Franciscus' Secretarial signatures	<i>Corroboratio</i> Francesco's signatures Seal Date Registration notes
4	DDS 88	<i>Cum Publica</i>	Hybrid	Francesco's signature Seal	Initial 'F' of 'Franciscus' <i>Corroboratio</i> Secretarial signature Date Registration notes
5	DDS 89	<i>Non Parvam</i>	Hybrid	Initial 'F' of 'Franciscus' <i>Corroboratio</i> Francesco's signature	Seal Secretarial signatures Date Registration notes
6	DDS 90	<i>Nomine Hippoliti</i>	Hybrid	Francesco's signature	Initial 'F' of 'Franciscus' <i>Corroboratio</i> Seal Secretarial signatures Date Registration notes
7	DDS 91	<i>A Magnifica</i>	Diploma	Initial 'F' of 'Franciscus' <i>Corroboratio</i> Francesco's signature Seal Secretarial signatures	Date Registration notes
8	DDS 92	<i>Cum Nuper</i>	Simple letter patent	Initial 'F' of 'Franciscus'	<i>Corroboratio</i> Francesco's signature Seal Secretarial signatures Date Registration notes

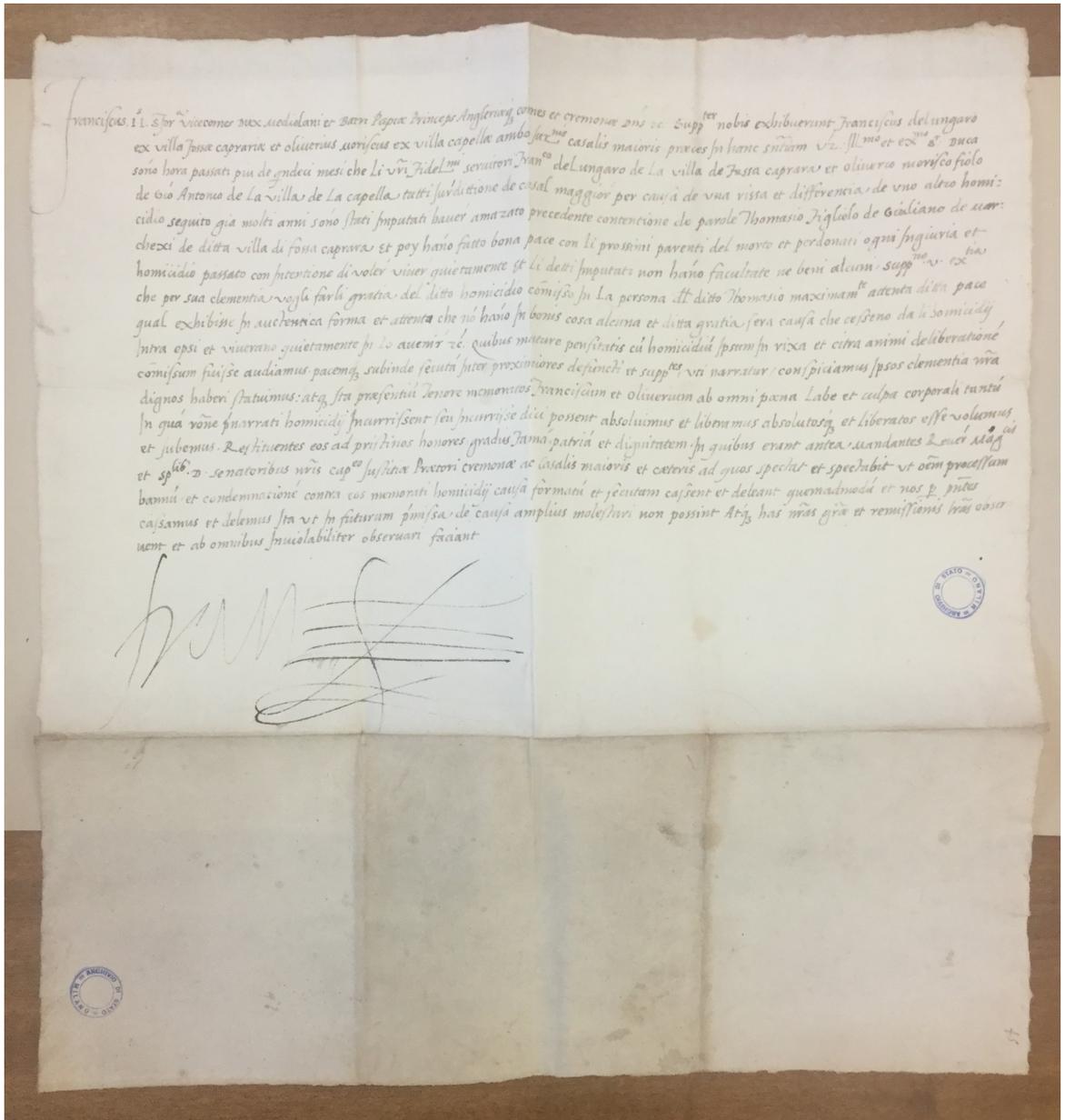


Fig. 6.7: Unfinished letter patent 1 – *Supplicanter Nobis* (DDS 83)

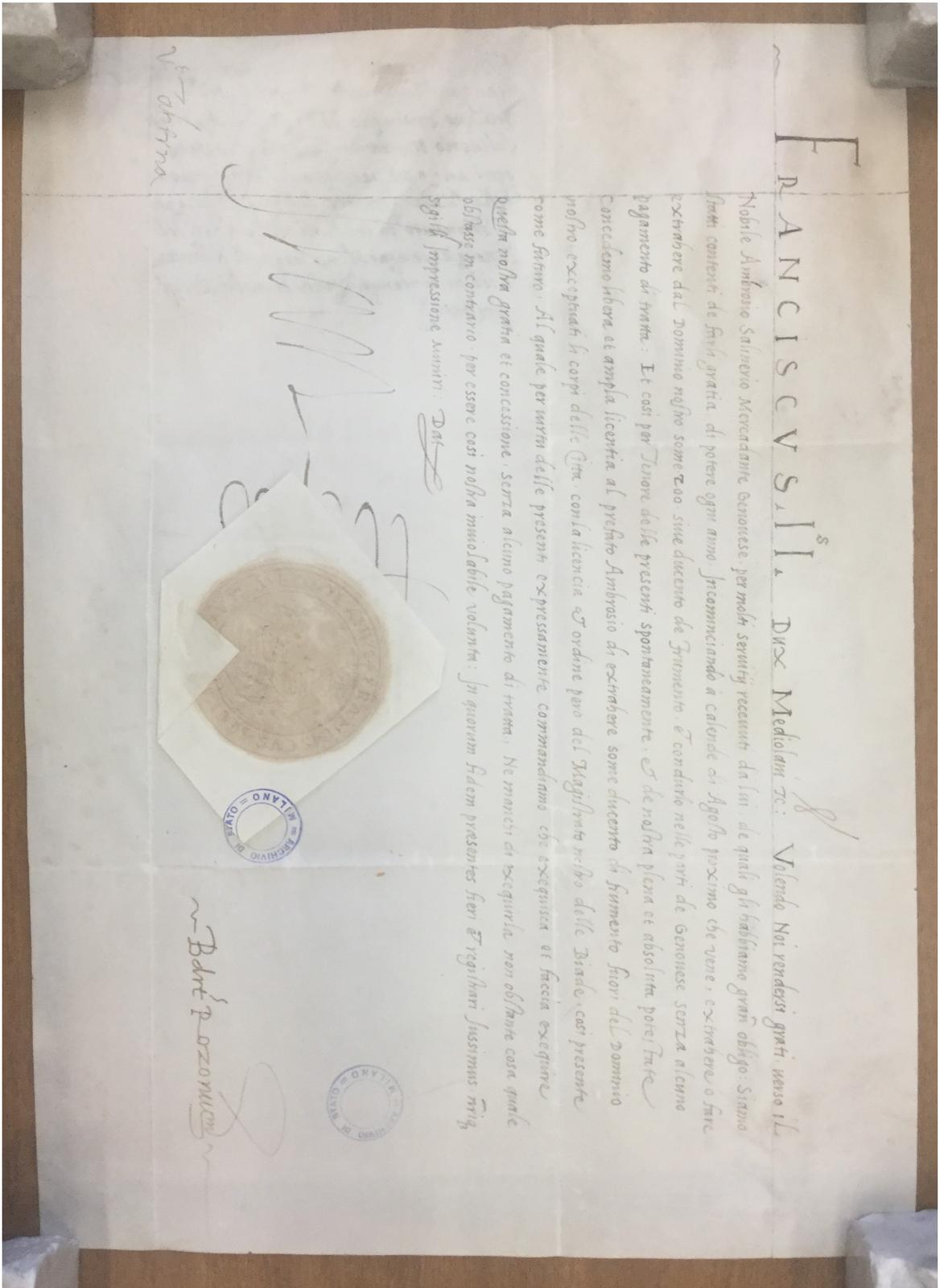


Fig. 6.8: Unfinished letter patent 2 – Volendo Noi (DDS 85)

5

canonicus. II. *Storta* vicecomes. *Dux Mediolani*, et *Barri*. *Raphe* Princeps, *Anglorum*
Comes, ac *Genue*, *Remane*, et *Alfredus*. *Potentibus* humiliter ven. *pbro Leonardo de*
Capredomus rectori *ecclie S. Ambrosii de Cavate* dicitur *laudensis*, qui *mandatum*
fecit ad *resignandum* in *manibus* *summi Pontificis* *illam* *suum* *procuratorem* *ecclesiam*,
in *favorem* *Hambals de Tagliabobis* *cuius*, et *clerici* *illan*, atq. *et* *ipso* *Hambale*,
sibi *per* *decreta*, et *ordines* *mos* *licere* *et* *sede* *agere* *imperare* *et* *recessione* *em* *opor*
super *cuiusmodi* *resignatione*, *benigne* *damus* *amvendum*, *quane* *per* *hntes* *decernimus*
nobis *placere*, *et* *vbi* *resignans* *fuert*, et *sit* *pacificus* *possessor* *ecclie* *predicte*, et
in *resignatione* *non* *interveniat* *lites* *simoniacae*, et *illi* *accedat* *consensus* *vicinor*
ius *patronatus*, et *electivum* *sintum*, *ut* *q. eor* *libere* *antedictam* *provisionem* *possit*
et *per* *sedes* *imperare*, ac *imperata* *libere* *uti*, et *q. notary*, et *procurator* *que* *libet*
in *hnt* *necessaria* *desuper* *conficere*, ac *testes* *illis* *intervenire* *valerant* *in* *quanc*, *in* *contra*
rum *facientibus* *non* *obstan*.

H. *Storta*
Notarius



Ge. *Gaduu*

Fig. 6.9: Unfinished letter patent 3 – *Potentibus Humiliter* (DDS 86)

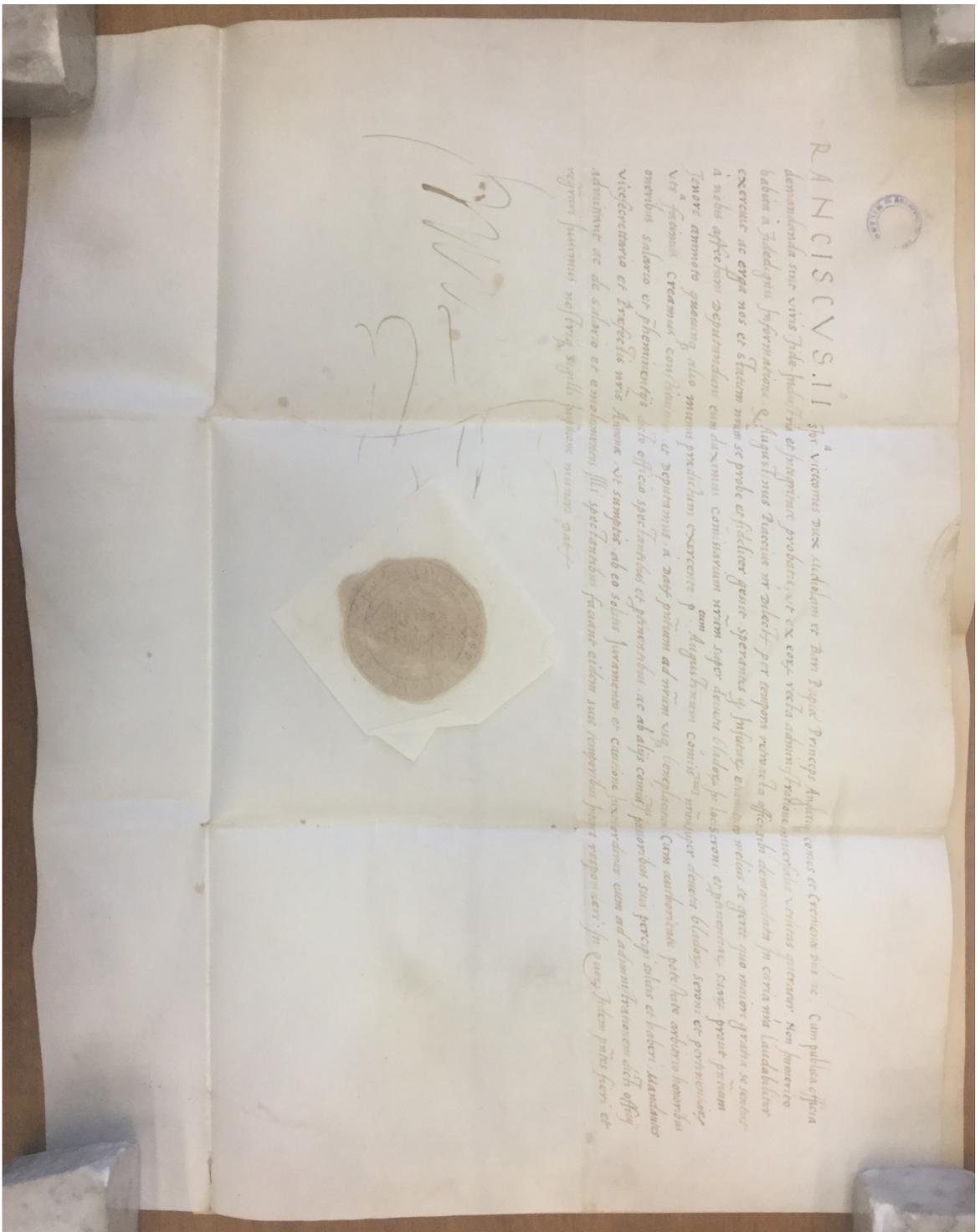


Fig. 6.10: Unfinished letter patent 4 – *Cum Publica* (DDS 88)

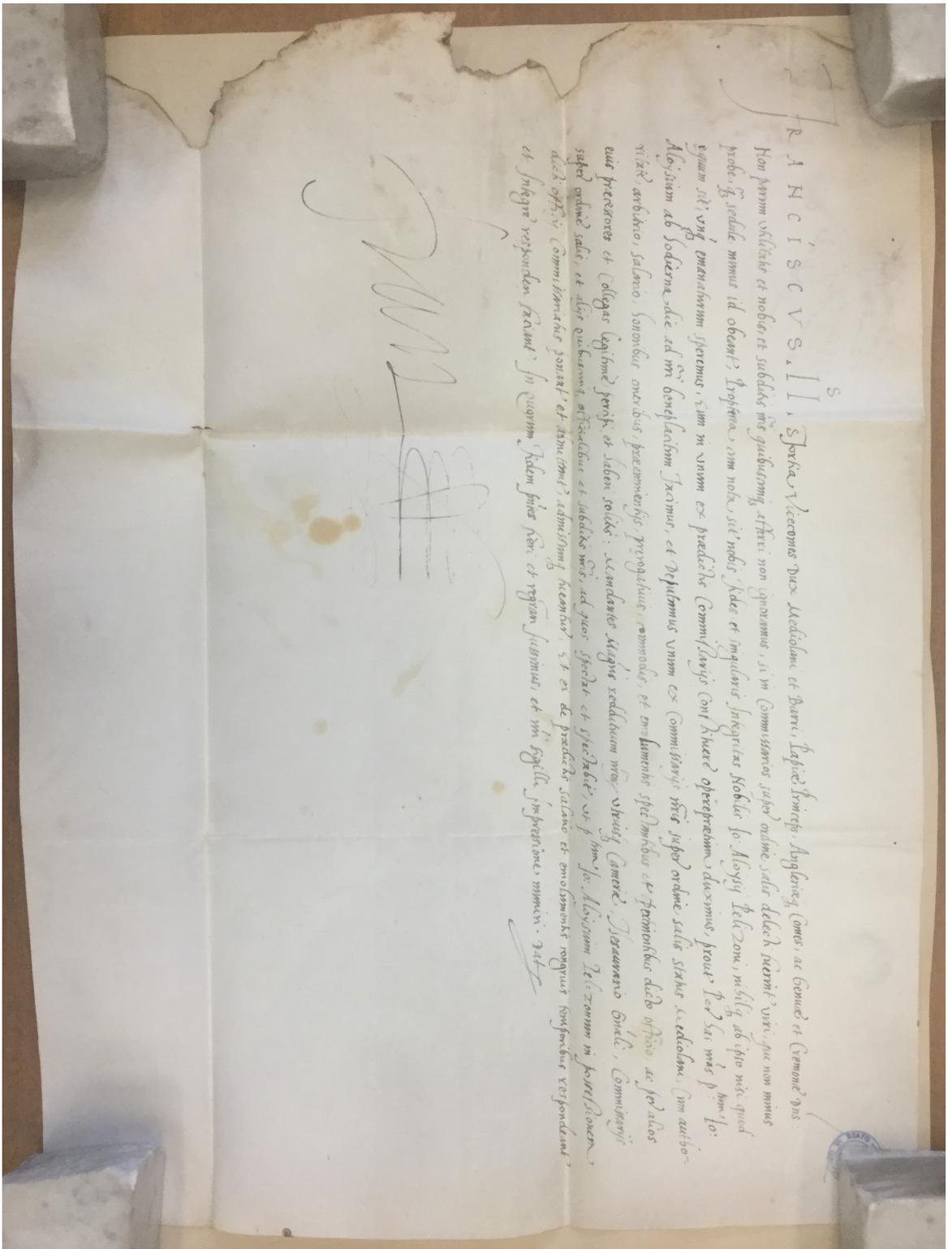


Fig. 6.11: Unfinished letter patent 5 – Non Parvam (DDS 89)

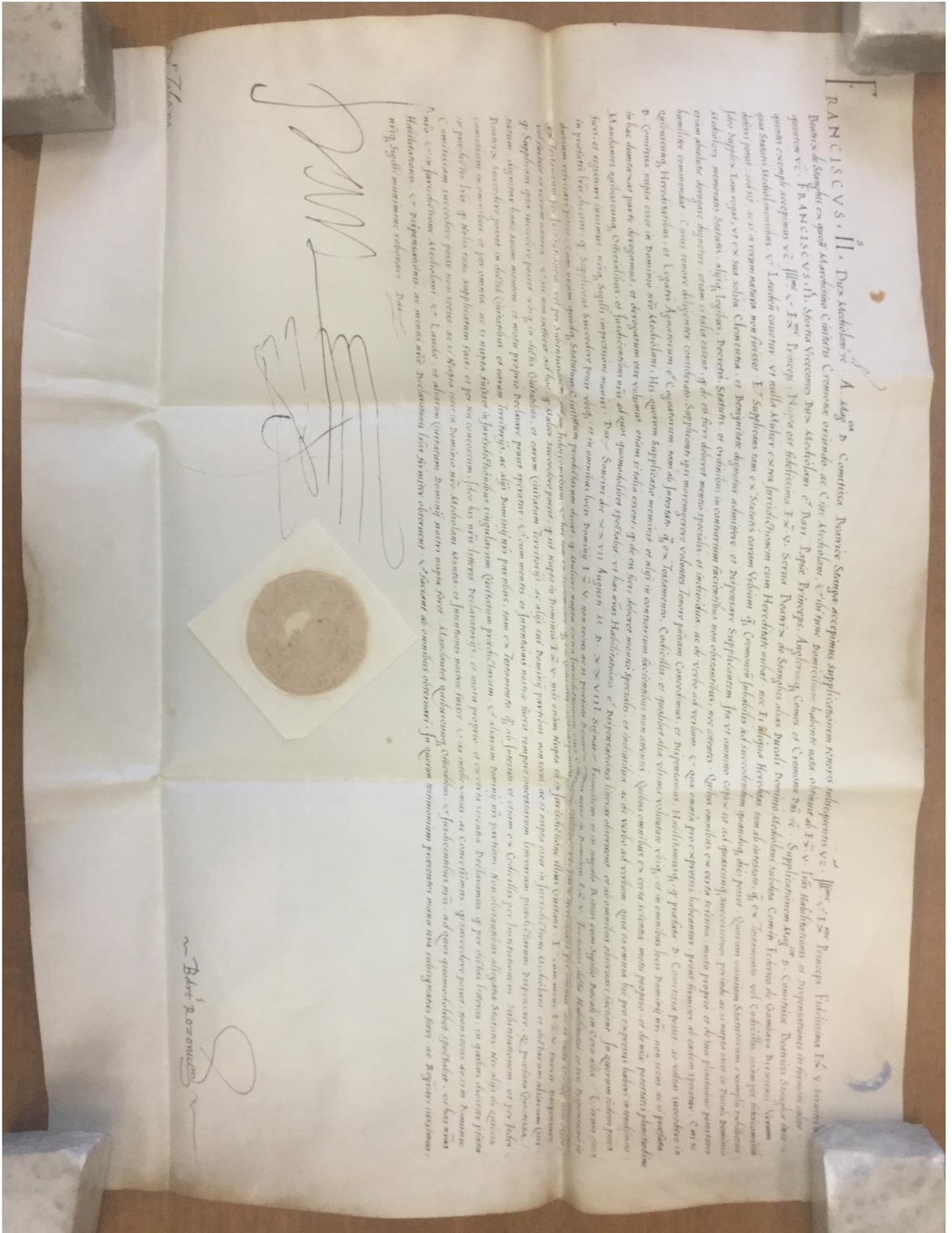


Fig. 6.13 – Unfinished letter patent 7 – *A Magnifica* (DDS 91)

reference: therefore, these documents are unfinished. The chancery started producing them, but the process stopped at some point. The reason of this interruption is unknown, except from one case, when a sentence to be added in the text was noted at the bottom of a letter patent, and this clearly caused the need to remake it (fig. 6.14, p. 237).

Originally, these documents were probably supposed to be discarded, but they somehow survived—this fact is by no means surprising. What is surprising is that they were included in a 'showcase' collection like the *DDS*, and that they were catalogued in the inventory without any warning as to their peculiarity. This confirms that the general aspect of letters patent was (and still is) able to divert attention from details that are crucial to their full comprehension. The narrative formally conveyed by the documents make-up looks more relevant than their strictly juridical value, which in this case is null. In a sense, these are documents/monuments at their finest, because their 'camouflage' wins over any other contextual consideration.

Nineteenth- or early-twentieth century archivists inserted the unfinished letters patent among the finished ones because the former, just like the latter, carried solemn documentary features—for example, the *intitulatio* in capital letters, or Francesco's huge autograph signature, and the ducal seal. But since such authoritative elements were apposed into the document before the document was finished, it means they were not necessarily decisive for the juridical validation of the document. After the problem of the lack of standardisation, the make-up of letters patent thus shows another point of weakness, and it is appropriate to turn now to the single unfinished documents in detail to know more.

Chart 6.1 at p. 229 lists the undated letters patent, two starting words of their text to identify them more conveniently, and their typology (as described above). For each document, I have noted what features existed or were missing when its production stopped. The analysis of the unfinished documents has led to the identification of seven substantial documentary features I will focus on in the following pages. Five of them—from the top to the bottom of the document: the initial 'F' of 'Franciscus,' the *corroboratio*, Francesco's signature, the seal, the secretaries' signatures—could either be included in or missing from the document. The remaining two—date and notes of registration—are always missing. Cross-checking the combination of existing and missing features in each unfinished letter patent will allow me to detect a series of meaningful patterns in the process of documentary production, and to better understand the actual authenticating value of each feature. This, in turn, will enable an informed reflection on the authorship

and on the very nature of letters patent, independently from their constructed make-up.

4.2. The narrative of the corroboratio and the reality of document making

In analysing unfinished letters patent that allow to glimpse the procedures of their production, the first element to look at is certainly their *corroboratio*—the declaration how the charter had been authenticated. Indeed, in the *corroboratio*, the document 'speaks of itself' by narrating the most significant stages that marked its own making. Therefore, we have the chance to answer two simple but important questions: is the *corroboratio* always trustworthy? And if not, in what sense does it mislead, or even lie?

The standard *corroboratio* for the documents produced in the secret chancery of Francesco II translates: 'As a testimony/warrant for such things [the contents enunciated in the text], we [the duke] order to make the present [letter], to register it, and to impress/append our seal to it.'⁹⁴ What is to be stressed immediately is that this statement is not only merely technical, but also strongly performative and political. According to the *corroboratio*, the duke in person directed the whole procedure of document making. He originated the procedure with the *jussio* (the order of creating the document,) he confirmed its validity with the order of registering the document, and he concluded it with the order of apposing his seal. This three-stage operation represents the climax of ducal authority, and it is no coincidence that the *personal* authentication of the duke—as represented by the seal—came after (and therefore prevailed over) the *bureaucratic* authentication of the registration notes. Hence, as pointed out earlier, the *corroboratio* is one of the internal features that contribute to monumentalise the document.

Now, let us focus on the eight unfinished documents to verify whether the *corroboratio* actually described the process of document-making as it unfolded. In three cases—*Supplicanter Nobis*, *Potentibus Humiliter*, *Nomine Hippoliti*—making the comparison is impossible, because the *corroboratio* is just missing. Actually, the impossibility of comparing narration and practice of document making is significant: it signals that the clause could not have been considered a pure formality. A scribe wrote protocol and text, setting all the terms of the act, but avoided describing the mode of validation until the eschatocol was materially carried out.

However, two other cases demonstrate that the *corroboratio* could also be written automatically, before the eschatocol signs of validation (date and registration notes, signatures and seal) had all been carried out. Indeed, *Cum Nuper* has the clause, but the

⁹⁴ 'In quorum testimonium/fidem presentes fieri iussimus, ac registrari, nostrique sigilli appensione/impressione muniri.'

rest of the eschatocol is missing, whereas *Non Parvam* has the clause and Francesco's signature, but lacks his seal, secretarial signatures, date and registration notes. Therefore, the ambitious *corroboratio* did not always actually describe what had happened during the making of the document. Rather, it was a formulaic passage that fictionalised Francesco II's authority independently from procedure.

In the three remaining cases, the rhetorical deception of the *corroboratio* emerging from the comparison with the unfinished letters patent is at the same time subtler and more thought-provoking. *Cum Publica* lacks only date and registration notes, while *Volendo Noi* and *A Magnifica* lack secretarial signatures, date and registration notes. It means that as a matter of fact, the elements of ducal identity (signature and seal) were deployed before the letters patent were validated. This fact overturns the whole narration of the *corroboratio*. The process of document making did not culminate in the duke's order of apposing the seal on the letter patent, but in the bureaucratic procedures that followed, despite the fact that the *corroboratio* purposefully described those procedures as preceding the final and decisive intervention of Francesco II in person. This calls for a closer scrutiny of the value of Francesco's signature and seal, the two elements that graphically monopolise the eschatocol.

4.3. The ducal signature: a validating feature?

In the letters patent produced by Francesco II's chancery, the signature of the duke normally has a huge size, and it occupies a vast portion of the eschatocol. In other words, its presence seems to have the importance and the function that is usually reserved for signatures—that is, demonstrating that its author has actually viewed and approved the signed document. However, strangely enough, the *corroboratio* nearly always ignores the presence of the duke's signature. The clause describes registration and sealing as fundamental steps of document-making, but generally overlooks the only autograph sign of the author on the document that bears his *intitulatio*. The same omission seems to have occurred under Francesco's predecessors.⁹⁵

Furthermore, six out of eight unfinished letters patent show the signature, thus suggesting that it came early in the process of documentation. Documents such as *Non Parvam* (fig. 6.11, p. 234) and *Nomine Hippoliti* (fig. 6.12, p. 235) are quite emblematic; here, the eschatocol was left empty—*Nomine Hippoliti* does not even have the *corroboratio*—but the signature was nonetheless in its place.

⁹⁵ Folder n. 9 of the *DDS* preserves letters patent issued under Ludovico Sforza: only five out of many tens are signed; and of the five signed letters patent, only one mentions the signature in the *corroboratio*.

The absence of the signature from the *corroboratio* and the regular presence of the signature in early-aborted documents suggests that pre-signed blank papers and charters were available in the secret chancery.⁹⁶ Some evidence, scattered but substantial, makes this hypothesis highly plausible. In analysing letters close, for example, I already pointed out how documents bearing the autograph signature of the duke were dispatched from Trent when Francesco was in Worms. In addition, we know that Sforza diplomats were given blank papers bearing only the ducal signature when they began a mission; indeed, in the *Sforzesco* archive, two undated documents listing the equipment of travelling agents mention ‘twenty signed papers’ (*viginti folia signata*) and, more explicitly, ‘twenty papers signed by the hand of the duke’ (*XX folii sottoscritti de mano del duca*).⁹⁷ Diplomats were probably authorised to use these materials to make official agreements directly on the site of their operations.

Furthermore, in a letter dated 16 December 1531 and transcribed in the *Registri delle Missive*, the chancery forbade the *Maestri delle Entrate Ordinarie* to forward mandates of payments to the treasurer, specifying that the prohibition was valid even if the mandates bore the signature of Francesco II: only the presence of the signature of first secretary Bartolomeo Rozzoni would validate the mandate. Evidently, this overt diminishment of the ducal signature would be hardly conceivable if we did not admit that the mandates of payment referred to were pre-signed. This entry of the *Registri delle Missive* confirms the fragmentation of documentary flows in the chancery already highlighted in Chapter 3 (e.g. pp. 112-113), and how their opening—or, in this case, their closure—depended on volatile internal relations of power. The same letter also shows the importance of a strictly documentary matter like this, because Francesco decided to add an autograph statement to the letter, reading ‘we want you to duly observe the said [order].’⁹⁸ It can hardly be a coincidence that another missive prescribing changes in the internal balance of the chancery—Rozzoni should have substituted Ricci in signing some mandates while the latter was employed in other tasks—was equally reinforced by an

96 Pre-signed documents were common in early modern offices, and facilitated abuses. In late-seventeenth century, for example, the complex system of passes England and Algiers agreed upon to identify ships and mariners was seriously undermined by the proliferation of pre-signed passports. See Vitkus 2001, Appendix n. 7, 369-370—cited in Eliav-Feldon 2012, 207.

97 ASMi, *Sforzesco, Potenze Sovrane, Atti e Scritture Camerali*, 1626, undated: ‘Expeditio Magnifici Equitis Domini Marchesini Stange Romam et Neapolim profecturi’, and ‘Expeditione per el Reverendissimo et Illustrissimo signore vicecan.’ The mention of Marchesino Stanga—a Sforza secretary at the time of duke Ludovico—suggests that these *expeditiones* were written during the 1490s.

98 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 225, ll. 36-37, 1531 December 16: ‘Il soprascripto volemo lo servati senza alcuna difficulta.’

autograph 'this is our express will.'⁹⁹

Finally, and somehow paradoxically, the very relative value of the signature is confirmed by the fact that there actually are some isolated cases in which the *corroboratio* does signal the signature's presence. In my corpus, this is true of two letters patent belonging to the solemn subset of the diplomas. One is unfinished (*A Magnifica*), and the mention of the signature was inserted at the beginning of the *corroboratio*: 'As a testimony for such things, we [the duke] order to make the present [letter] *signed with our own hand*, to register it (...)'¹⁰⁰ The other diploma dates 29 July 1531, and the mention was inserted at the end of the clause: 'we order (...) to register it, to seal it, and *we sign it with our own hand*.'¹⁰¹ The fact that these mentions are to be found in two diplomas, rather than in simple letters patent, may suggest that in some exceptional cases the duke actually signed the documents as part of the documents' validation, and the clause duly reported this practice. But in the majority of cases, when the mention of the signature is missing, we should then conclude that its presence was definitely more symbolic than functional.

Therefore, after the *corroboratio*, another documentary feature that decisively contributes to the authoritativeness of the document make-up proves to be largely accessory when put to the test. And this time we are not talking about a clause, but about the signature, the validating mark par excellence, representing the author as both individual and authority. As we have seen, it was an element of writing that Francesco II was very keen to micro-manage in letters close.

4.4. The ducal seal: a powerful tool for collective use

The other sign of ducal authority that occupies the space of the eschatocol is the seal. The seal is always mentioned in the *corroboratio*, which also specifies if it is impressed or pendant. Unlike the signature, the seal must be considered a very powerful tool. In Chapter 3, for example, we have already encountered a chancery clerk defined as 'seal-keeper' (*quello che tene il sigillo*), who was subjected to a specific *Ordo* of regulations. To remain within Ciccio Simonetta's chancery *Ordines*, the implicit anxiety with which the management of the seal is described confirms its great importance:

Item the ushers must not seal any letter before showing it to the seal-keeper and to the treasurer of the chancery, or to those who are authorised [to do so] following the rules of the said chancery; and after [the letters] are sealed they [the ushers] have to give them back, handing them to the one who wrote it, or to the treasures, or to the

99 *Ibid.*, l. 40, 1532 May 12: 'Questa è l'expressa nostra volonta.'

100 'In quorum testimonium praesentes manu nostra manu nostra subsignatas fieri, ac registrari iussimus'

101 '(...) registrari, sigillari iussimus, manaque propria subscripsimus'

said authorised people; and these latter have to hand and distribute them to whom it will concern, or to the master of the mounted messengers (...) and them ushers must not give away any letter without express license of the said treasure, or of the above-mentioned authorised people.¹⁰²

Here, the *Ordines* struggled to devise a rigid procedure for monitoring the sealing of documents and the handling of the sealed documents awaiting dispatch. The seal was important both as a symbol and as a material object: its physical handling ensured a remarkable share of power. With respect to this, the most emblematic episode of the Sforza age occurred during the 1490s, when the *Consiglio di Giustizia* fiercely opposed duke Ludovico's decision to transfer the seal from the hands of the counsellors to those of a newly-appointed secretary of the council's chancery, Nicolò Gambarelli. Gambarelli, on his part, had gone so far as to indicate the possession of the seal as a non-negotiable condition for accepting the appointment.¹⁰³

These facts certainly remove all doubt regarding the authority attached to the seal, but they also open another question: who controlled the seal, using (or abusing) such authority? Once again, we face a relevant mismatch between the rhetoric of documentary internal/external features on one side, and the reality of document-making on the other. What the ducal seal 'tells of itself,' in the final make-up of letters patent, is that it was the seal *of the duke*. It bore his name and coat of arms, it materialised its peremptory will. In practice, however, the seal was by all means a collective asset. It represented the duke, but it was independent from his person.

The collective use of the ducal seal is no original discovery: as early as in 1943, Giacomo Bascapé noticed that even the signet-ring¹⁰⁴ the dukes used to validate the most important documents—named *corniola secreta* ('secret carnelian,' carnelian being a semi-precious gemstone used for the purpose of sealing documents since antiquity,) an object so personal that Ludovico Sforza had it minted with the likeness of his dead wife Beatrice d'Este—could be overtly handed over to secretaries with the simple request of not misusing it.¹⁰⁵ Yet, scholars overlook the profound consequences this fact has on the

102 BTMi, *Cod. Triv.* 1325, f. 92: 'Item che [gli uschieri] non debbano sigillare lettera alcuna che prima non la faciano vedere a quello che tene el sigillo, et lo thesaurero de la cancellaria, o vero alli deputati secundo li ordini dessa cancellaria; et postquem siano sigillate le debiano restituere, et dare ad quello le havesse scripte, o vero al tesorero o vero alli deputati ut supra, li quali habiano loro ad dare et distribuire a cui le spectarano, o vero le debiano dare al ufficiale di cavallari (...) et che per niente essi uschieri non se debiano impazare de darne veruna senza expressa licentia del dicto tesorero, o vero deputati ut supra.'

103 Covini 2007, 36-37.

104 Beal 2008, 384: 'signet' means a small seal, usually fixed into a finger-ring, or signet-ring, used to stamp an impression in hot wax.'

105 Bascapé 1942-1943, 14. Ludovico wanted the documents issued under the *corniola secreta* to be transcribed in a dedicated register. There is evidence of the use of the *corniola* also under Francesco II (ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 225, l. 40, 1532 May 22).

nature of sovereign power, especially because they fail to contextualise it in the bigger picture of document-making that I have been putting together: seals were tools for collective use, demonstrating less the authority of the duke than the sharing of power by chancery members.

4.5. The preeminence of secretarial signatures over the ducal signature, and the many procedures of document making

In order to complete the above-mentioned picture, something has yet to be said about secretarial signatures, the different procedures through which all the necessary validating elements were placed on letters patent, and letters patent' illumination. The analysis of secretarial signatures highlights another relevant mismatch between the make-up and the making of letters patent. The signatures of the *Gran Cancelliere* (when acting—that is, between 1522 and 1525 and between 1533 and 1535) and of one of the secretaries (nearly always the *primo segretario*) are never mentioned in the *corroboratio*, as if they played only an auxiliary role in the authentication of the document. In addition, interestingly enough, the omission of secretarial signatures from the *corroboratio* could find a material representation in the most solemn documents. Indeed, in the documents that I labelled as diplomas, the *plica* normally hides secretarial signatures, so that the reader's attention is automatically directed to the duke's huge signature and to the seal. This effect was obtained *on purpose*, because in some cases, the *plica* hiding the secretarial signatures was made even when its presence was not technically justified by the apposition of the pendant seal—which caused the need to reinforce the parchment where the seal was tied (see for example *A Magnifica*, fig. 6.13, p. 236).

This symbolic preeminence of the ducal signature over secretarial signatures in the make-up of letters patent does not match the balance emerging from the documents' making. The organisation of Sforza registers, for example, demonstrates that secretarial signatures had an actual authenticating value. Indeed, the signatures of the *Gran Cancelliere* and of the secretaries are always to be found at the bottom of each entry, with no exception, whereas the signature of the duke is often absent—a clue of its possible accessoriness. The analysis of the unfinished letters patent points to the same direction. In four out of eight cases (*Supplicanter Nobis*, *Cum Publica*, *Non Parvam*, *Nomine Hippoliti*), the ducal signature appears and secretarial signatures do not, suggesting that the latter had power over the first. Two other unfinished documents (*Volendo Noi*, *A Magnifica*) bear both ducal and secretarial signatures.

But even the only case in which secretaries signed before the duke—*Potentibus*

Humiliter (fig. 6.9, p. 232)—is instructive, because it shows that letters patent in their making resembled a complex socio-political jigsaw rather than a celebratory monument to the authority of the sovereign. As I repeatedly pointed out, the assemblage of a document did not follow stable procedures, but resulted from an extemporary series of actions and 'counter-actions' in which timing and 'spatiality' (being there at the right moment) were crucial.

Had *Potentibus Humiliter* been completed, the juridical act it established would formally consist in the go-ahead given by Francesco II to the transfer of the rectorship of a countryside parish from the current rector, Leonardo de Capitedomus, to a Milanese cleric, Annibale Tagliabue. As usual, in the finished letter patent, the operation is presented as if it has been fully directed by Francesco himself: we find his name in the *intitulatio* and some clear orders in the *dispositio*, such as 'we mercifully order' (*benigne duximus*) and 'we decide to consent' (*decernimus nobis placere*). However, as stated at the beginning, the document originated from a joint petition of the outgoing and incoming rectors, who had already agreed on the succession and merely sought official approval. And, more importantly, the form of the unfinished document suggests that the beneficial chancery probably arranged everything without the concurrence of the duke. Indeed, the letter bears only the secretarial signatures of *Gran Cancelliere* Girolamo Morone and ecclesiastical secretary Giorgio Gadio, without any sign of ducal authority. Therefore, in this case, the *jussio* certainly had not come from Francesco. We should rather see the letter patent from the opposite perspective: that of the petitioners. They probably drafted the documents themselves, obtained a first approval from Morone and Gadio, and were just one signature away (that of Francesco) from getting their motion successfully authenticated through the chancery.

Besides its specific history, *Potentibus Humiliter* demonstrates that the document make-up represented the end of a process that could have followed different procedures, different influences and interferences, different tensions. The question of the authorship of documents returns, and is possibly more problematic than it is for letters close. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the authorship of letters close was open to sharing, but the duke could at least count on an elaborated range of autography strategies to highlight his actual agency on paper, and to make the letters more or less personal. By contrast, in the making of letters patent, there was practically no difference between documents issued actually following the will or the involvement of Francesco II, and documents in which the chancery had appropriated ducal identity independently from his person.

4.6. *Illumination (or lack thereof) and the reception of letters patent*

The last documentary feature to analyse is illumination. Illumination represents, by all means, a documentary element of its own kind, because it did not have any legal or authenticating function. For this reason, it is completely overlooked by classic diplomatics, which evidently deems it as superfluous, and ultimately irrelevant to the understanding of a document's meaning. But is it actually the case? After all, illumination is the element that contributes more effectively to the monumentality of a letter patent, because adding iconography to a textual object meant changing its most inherent function from informational to representational. When decorated, a letter patent ceases to be simply a text to be read, and first and foremost becomes an object to *look at*. New diplomatics has to consider this fundamental fact and its consequences—last year, Jessica Berenbeim has published an important book-length study on the importance of the decoration of medieval cartularies and charters.¹⁰⁶

In the corpus of documents I am analysing, three letters patent are illuminated. Two of them belong to the *DDS*, and date 18 January 1523 (*DDS* 7, fig. 6.6, p. 226) and 29 September 1533 (*DDS* 70, fig. 6.4, p. 224); the third one belongs to the *Cimeli*, and dates 18 October 1526 (*Cimeli* 18, fig. 6.5, p. 225). These documents record very different juridical acts: the first one is a safe-conduct, granted to physician Ottaviano Brambilla de Villa; the second one is the confirmation of all the privileges and immunities previously granted to the Dominican friars of Santa Maria delle Grazie, a Milanese church and convent; the third one is the appointment of Girolamo Brebbia as General Treasurer to the Sforza.

The choice of iconographic themes for letters patent was often highly strategic, a way to condense complex messages. The two charters belonging to the *DDS* have the entire name *Franciscus* illuminated, with the initial 'F' decorated with abstract motives. Moreover, both charters show the coat-of-arms of Francesco II, with the Visconti-Sforza viper and the imperial eagle, the latter signifying that the Sforza derived their ducal dignity from the Sacred Roman Empire (figg. 6.15, 6.16, pp. 247).¹⁰⁷ The coat-of-arms is sided by the emblem of the buckets and burning logs, originally a Visconti device, which was later extensively used under Galeazzo Maria Sforza. Of the many emblems the Sforza adopted throughout their history as dukes, the one with the buckets and burning logs was definitely Francesco's favourite, as it appeared also in printed proclamations on

¹⁰⁶ Berenbeim 2015.

¹⁰⁷ For the origins and the history of Visconti-Sforza viper, see Zaninetta 2013, 141-208. For the success of the imperial eagle, see Leydi 1999.

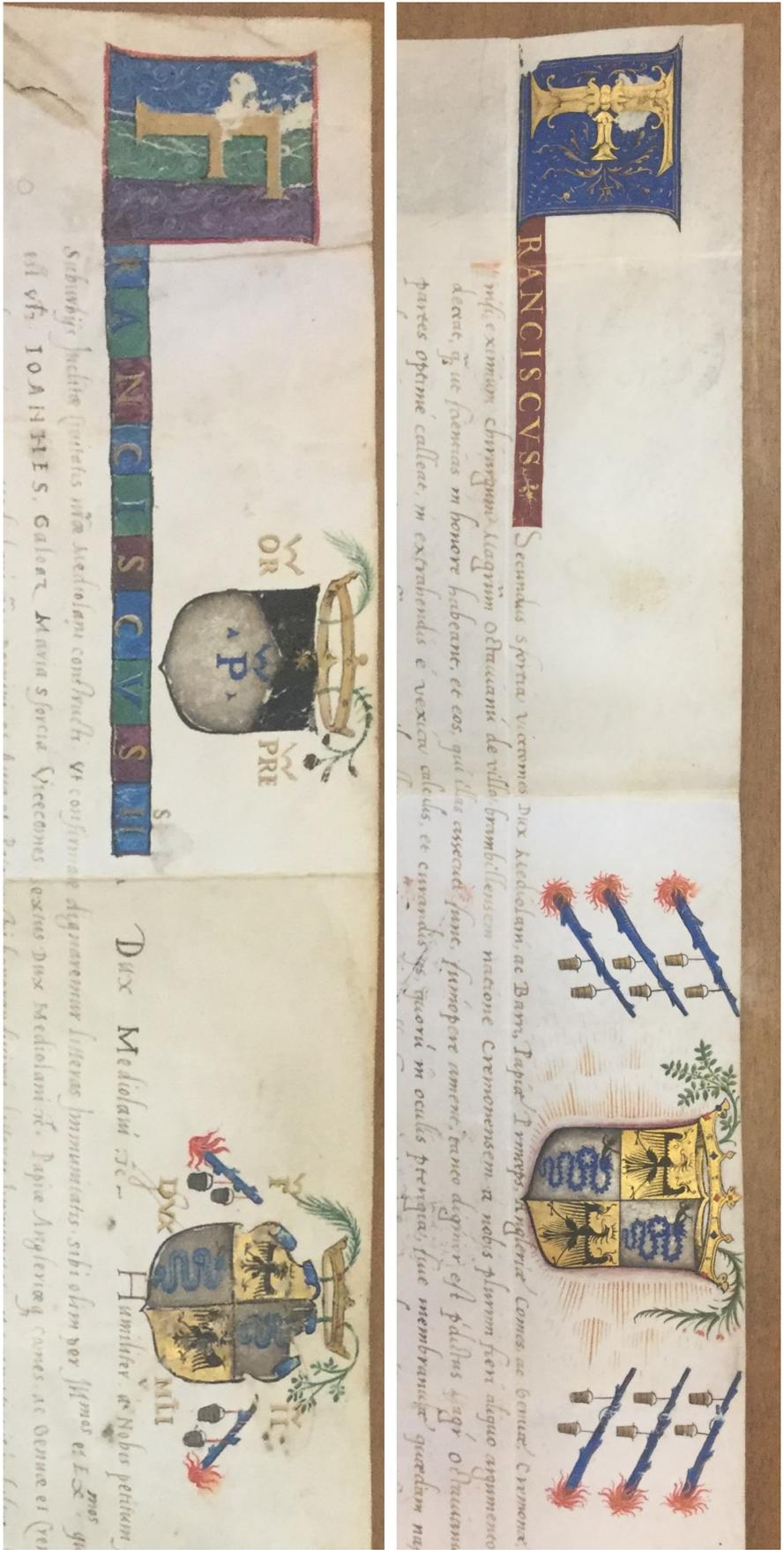


Fig. 6.15, 6.16: Miniatures of DDS 7 (right) and DDS 70 (left)



Fig. 6.20: Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 434, f. 1r. A miniature depicting Ludovico Sforza in the act of delivering a donation letter patent in the hands of the prior of Santa Maria delle Grazie

the walls of Milan.¹⁰⁸ (fig. 6.17, p. 248) The emblem symbolised merciless determination (the burning logs) together with the necessary ability to temper it when needed (the buckets full of water.) The motto *ardo et extinguo* ('I light, and I extinguish') often accompanied the emblem, and probably signified that sense of self-determination that Francesco wished for himself. In addition, the illuminated letter patent of the *Cimeli* has the initial 'F' of *Franciscus* shaped as a dragon (fig. 6.18, p. 249). Here, the inspiration clearly came from the charters of grandfather Francesco I Sforza (fig. 6.19, p. 249), an illustrious model that could be recalled easily and effectively. The latter, in turn, had strongly relied on the symbolic continuity between his initial 'F' and that of the last Visconti duke, Filippo Maria, in the many symbolic attempts to stress the Sforza's (far from solid) right of succession to the previous dynasty.¹⁰⁹

At first sight, these miniatures and their iconography look like fully authority-commanded features, synthetic and imperative expressions of power stressing their author's unchallenged political will. Yet, illumination could also become a field of subtle iconographic competition between different characters, as demonstrated by *DDS 70* (fig. 6.4, p. 224, and 6.17, 248). As anticipated, the document consists in the confirmation of a series of past privileges and immunities to the Dominicans of Santa Maria delle Grazie. This church, famous for hosting Leonardo da Vinci's fresco *The Last Supper*, represented the most prestigious Milanese landmark for the Sforza: during the 1490s, duke Ludovico concentrated there a great share of the efforts he made to glorify himself and his dynasty, and also to turn Milan into a first-rate city of art.¹¹⁰ For these reasons, confirming the bond that existed between the ruling family—now represented by Francesco II—and the Dominicans was an event that deserved proper documentary representation. This is so true that a cartulary (compiled between 1499 and 1541, and now preserved at New York's Pierpont Morgan Library,) containing the transcription of a series of documents in favour of Santa Maria delle Grazie, has its first page illuminated with an image depicting Ludovico in the act of delivering a donation letter patent in the hands of the prior of the convent (fig. 6.20, p. 250).

So how was the renovated bond between Francesco II and the Dominicans to be represented? In this case, the design of the diploma's decoration certainly resulted from negotiation between multiple actors, rather than from the exclusive desires of Francesco

108 ASMi, *Sforzesco, Potenze Sovrane, Atti Ducali. Grude*, 1504, 1525 July 10. For a recap on the Sforza iconography and iconology, usefully centered on Francesco II, see Albertario 2001.

109 Senatore 1998, 91.

110 Romani 1998, Marani, Cecchi, and Mulazzani 1986..

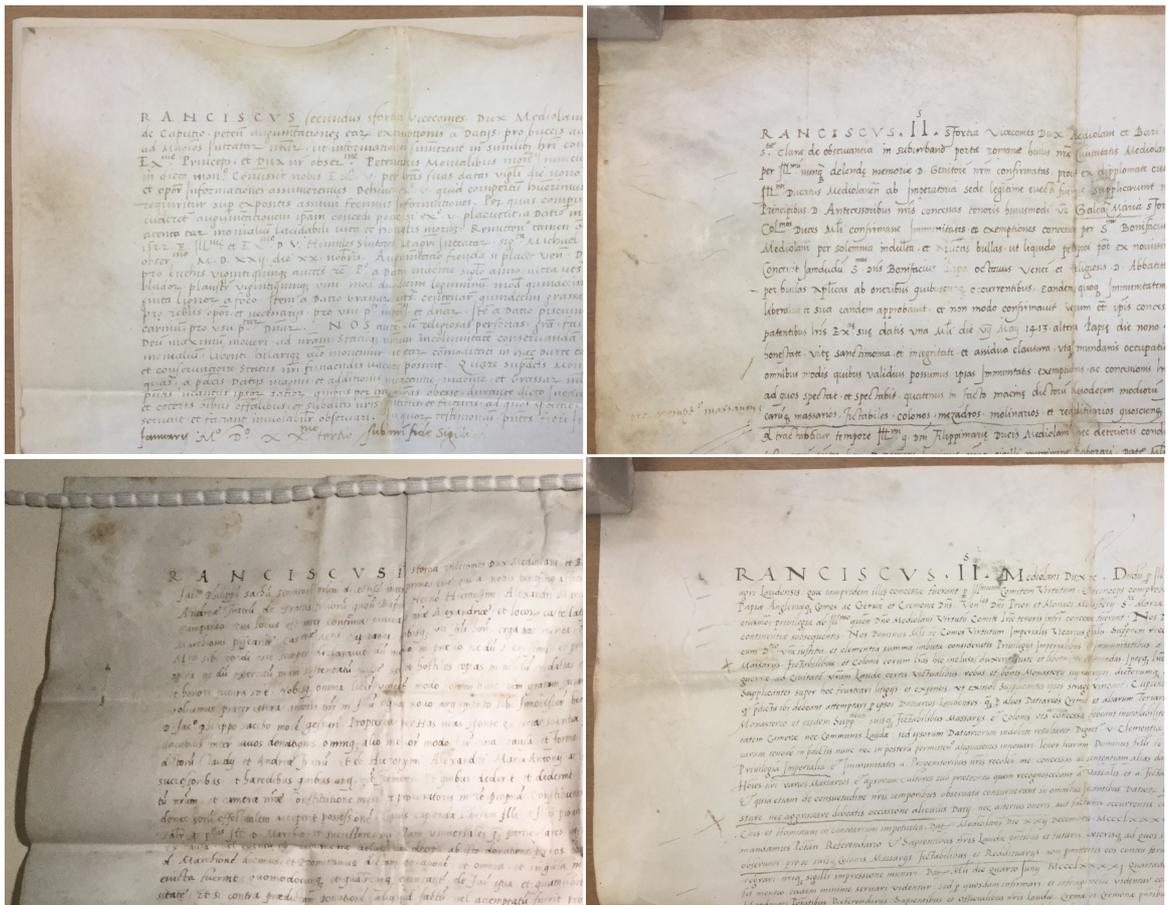


Fig. 6.21-6.24 (clockwise): DDS 8, 16, 47 and Cimeli 60, all showing a blank space where the illuminated 'F' of *Franciscus* should have found place

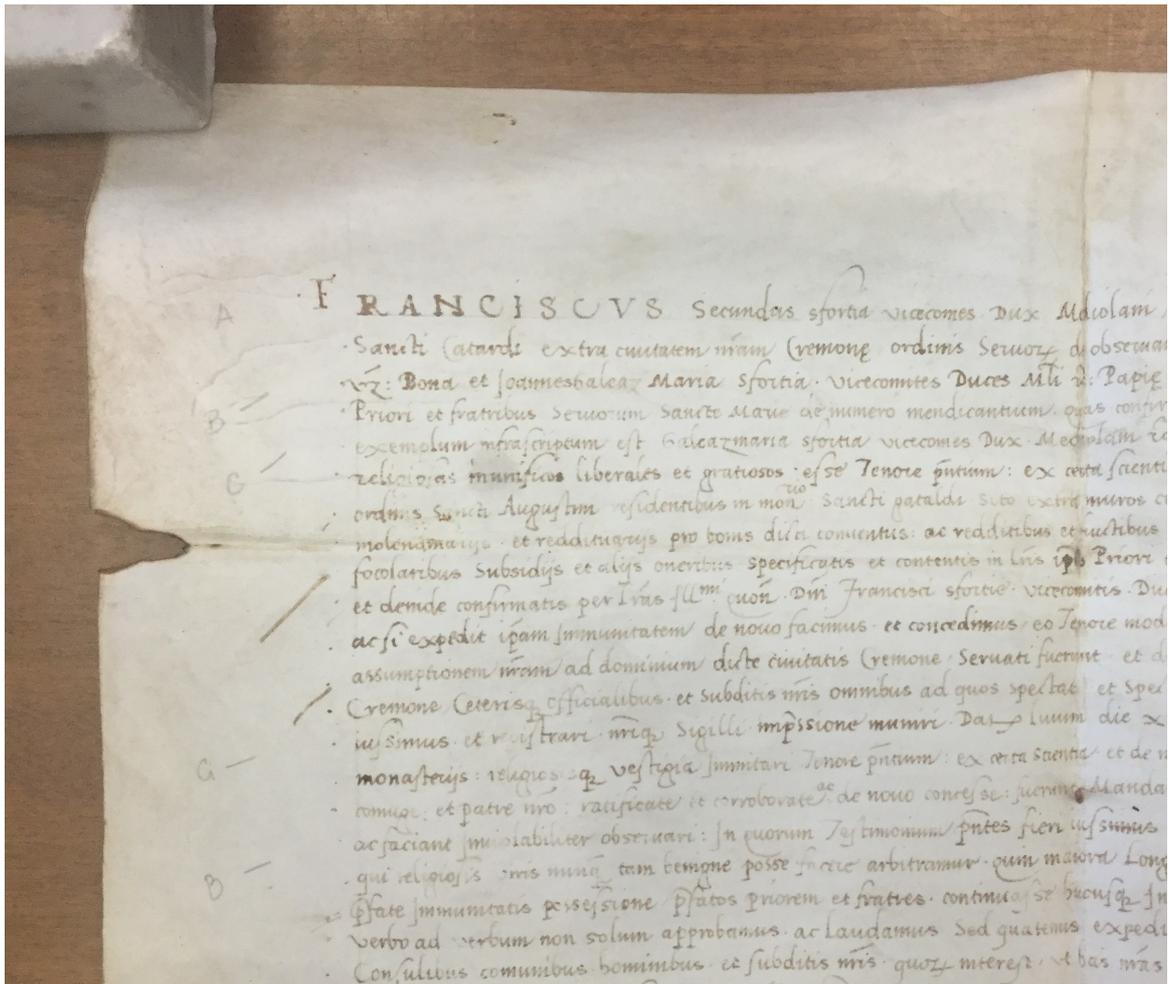


Fig. 6.25: An example of letter patent in which the initial 'F' of *Franciscus* was left non-illuminated, but the blank space was later filled with a simple 'F.'

II. Indeed, the Sforza coat-of-arms is not alone. In the upper part of the diploma, to the left, we find the typical black and white shield of the Dominican order. To the right, another coat-of-arms, with the letters 'F' and 'T' on the sides, is the mark of *Gran Cancelliere* Francesco Taverna, and is significantly surmounted by the imperial eagle, proudly signalling Taverna's recent nomination as Count Palatine, a title awarded by emperor Charles V in 1531. The centrality of the Sforza arms implies Francesco II's formal hierarchical preeminence. And yet, the arms of the Dominicans and those of Taverna are as big as the Sforza's. On the one hand, the friars probably did not want to be documented as mere passive subjects of a merciful decision coming from above. With their arms illuminated on parchment, the diploma became *theirs* as much as the duke's. On the other hand, the presence of the illuminated arms of Taverna highlights the spectacular rise of a skilled *homo novus* who, as we know from the charter I presented at the beginning of the general introduction (p. 11-14), had had a great influence on the documentary production of the Sforza chancery even before becoming *Gran Cancelliere*.¹¹¹ The symbolic exploit of this diploma suggests that Taverna wanted to associate his status with that of the duke.

However, besides this fascinating case of competing coat-of-arms, the most significant characteristic of the miniatures in the *DDS* and in the *Cimeli* is their recurrent *absence*. Indeed, in four letters patent, the space for the illuminated 'F' of *Franciscus* was just left blank (*DDS* 8, 16, 47, *Cimeli* 60, figg. 6.21-6.24, p. 252). These documents were clearly dispatched without being decorated, because they bear all the necessary signs of authentication: signatures, seal, date and registration notes are in place. The reason of the lack of miniatures probably had to do with the costs of the illumination:¹¹² the chancery could not afford to decorate all the acts it produced. Yet, such policy of *non*-illuminating some letters patent was also deeply contradictory. Indeed, on the one hand, the chancery set up a document/monument, whose make-up was primarily intended to convey an idea of authority. On the other hand, the making of letters patent never achieved completion, and the missing part—the miniature—was the crucial feature that turned the document into a monument.

Hence, the chancery could issue non-illuminated documents and leave the option

111 Senator and ambassador to the Sforza throughout the 1520s, Taverna was nominated count palatine by Charles V in 1531. In July 1533, Francesco II appointed him as *Gran Cancelliere*, a post that he would hold for 27 years. He is the only Italian *Gran Cancelliere* of early modern Milan, the post being normally reserved to close 'foreign' representatives of the Spanish kings. In 1536, Charles V granted Taverna the imperial fief of Landriano.

112 For a detailed study on the costs of miniatures in late-fifteenth century, see Melograni 2005.

of decorating them the to their recipients, who could solemnise them to their liking and at their expense. This is absolutely relevant, because it opens the way to assess the documents from the point of view of their reception, something that seldom leaves visible marks on paper or parchment. Furthermore, the idea that documents created and authenticated in the chancery could be completed outside it, in a workshop, following the will of their recipients, introduces the possibility that recipients themselves were participants in the production of the charter, and could actively contribute to its meaning.

With its clear-cut classifications, classic diplomatics ignores, indeed rejects this potential mix between the author and the recipient of a document.¹¹³ But in fact, it is clear that recipients decided to decorate charters because they wished to turn their mere juridical value into something more symbolically meaningful, suitable not only for archival preservation, but for self-representation, display or circulation.¹¹⁴ And indeed, the small literature on the Visconti-Sforza illuminated charters does mention two interesting cases of families or individuals that seem to have enacted a systematic programme of charters decoration as a means to promote themselves. The first case involves the Borromeo family at the beginning of its political ascent in the first half of the fifteenth century. According to Giulia Bologna, the Borromeos chose one of *their own* trusted illuminators, Giovanni da Vaprio, to decorate at least four charters between 1437 and 1445.¹¹⁵ The second case sees a nobleman, Giovanni del Maino, richly decorating seven charters throughout the second half of the fifteenth century.¹¹⁶ It is worth pointing out that del Maino was so keen to turn some rather mundane legal documents into personalised and treasured possessions that he illuminated documents that were not originally meant to bear any decoration.¹¹⁷ Indeed, in three letters patent, the miniaturist had to *erase* the non-illuminated name of the charter's author in the *intitulatio* to replace it with its decorated version. This physical, almost violent operation is not merely technical, because it materially represents the symbolic-political agenda of the charter's recipient prevailing over that of its author; a sign that the recipient did not consider the diploma as a sacred, untouchable relic of the authority that was issuing it, but rather as a dynamic object that

113 In the early 1970s—few years before Le Goff's 'Documento/monumento'—Italian diplomatics scholar Alessandro Pratesi still defined as 'nonsense' the idea of a contextual exchange of roles between the author and the recipient of a document. Pratesi 1992, 89-93.

114 For a recent study on the act of displaying (art) objects, see Furlotti 2015.

115 Bologna 1971, 188.

116 Ceruti 2013.

117 With the expression 'treasured possessions,' I wish to echo the title of a book (deriving from an exhibition held at Cambridge's Fitzwilliams Museum in 2015) that explores the significance of choosing, acquiring, and—as in del Maino's case—personalising and treasuring objects in a historical perspective. See Avery, Calaresu and Laven 2015.

could 'light-heartedly' be acted upon from below.¹¹⁸

In this context, the opposite decision of *not* decorating a charter becomes meaningful in its own right. It means that the recipient was content with the juridical act formalised in the charter, and declined to foster the monumentalisation of the document any further, despite the possibility left open by the authority that produced the letter patent. In exchange for the sustenance of the costs of the miniature, the chancery of Francesco II offered the recipients the chance to direct the illumination of the charters, with the creation of a document-monument that symbolically benefited both Francesco and the recipient. However, several recipients probably concluded that spending money to solemnise a charter issued by a weak prince like Francesco was an investment marked by high risk and low reward. As a consequence, many of them received the charter and probably thought that, at least, adding a non-illuminated 'F' was advisable to fill in the blank—a frequent solution in the *DDS* (fig. 6.25, p. 253). Other recipients, instead, just kept the charter for future reference, and did not even care about completing what was a very evident omission.

Whatever the case, all the episodes described in this sub-section underscore the same contradiction. On the one hand, illumination, when analysed in the final make-up of chancery diplomas, seems the most incontrovertibly authoritative of all documentary features. On the other hand, when considered in the concrete unfolding of the diplomas' making, illumination was in fact often negotiated with, or directly commanded by, the recipients of the diplomas. They could either use illumination for pursuing *their own* iconographic programmes of symbolic-political promotion, or they could avoid using it, thus implicitly showing little regard for Francesco II's status and authority. This works as one last and instructive proof of the difference between the meaning of documents-as-products (or monuments) and that of documents-as-processes. Since the entire chapter has been based on this product-process dichotomy, let us now conclude with a summary of the mismatches that have emerged from its analysis.

First of all, on the one hand, through the analysis of the final make-up of letters patent, I have drawn attention to the fact that every single diplomatic feature they display is aimed at affirming that Francesco II exercised his unchallenged authority following his own precise will. This is what turns letters patent in documents/monuments: the essential and powerful political message they conveyed independently from the specific juridical act

¹¹⁸ BTMi, *Pergamene Miniata*, 33 and 35; AOMMi, *Diplomi*, 1549. I owe this precious hint to Enrico Ceruti, whom I wish to thank.

they were establishing.

On the other hand, though, I have started scrutinising the plausibility of the monumentality of letters patent by asking a simple question: if letters patent as finished products were so peremptory in affirming the undisputed authority of Francesco II, then why did they come in so many different forms and shapes? If Francesco's chancery was unable to serialise its production and rank its own documents in a fixed hierarchy, then the type of juridical act and—more importantly—the standing of the documents' recipients evidently influenced the documents' design. It is crucial to stress that this *in itself* is a point of weakness in the purported monolithic monumentality of letters patent, and realising it is also a first general step towards the de-construction of their authoritative aspect. To further this de-construction, I have taken the single documentary elements that make the greatest contribution to the solemnisation of letters patent, and I have assessed whether the 'monumentalising' effect they create in the documents' make-up matches their actual role as seen from the perspective of the documents' making of. Eight unfinished letters patent have allowed me to observe the succession of stages in the process of documentary production.

The first element I have focused on is the *corroboratio*, the clause through which letters patent 'speak of themselves' insofar as the actions taken for authenticating them are described. According to the *corroboratio*, Francesco II followed the production of a given document from start to finish. Firstly, he gave the order (*jussio*) of creating the document; secondly, he ordered to take the required bureaucratic actions to register it and make it available for future reference; finally, he ordered to seal the document with the mark of his own authority, thus concluding the process imperatively. Therefore, seen in the final make-up of letters patent, the *corroboratio* delineates a climax celebrating the undisputed power of Francesco. By contrast, the situation is very different if we observe the use of the *corroboratio* in the letters patent that were yet to be completed. On the one hand, two letters patent show that the *corroboratio* could be written before any of the actions to authenticate the documents were taken; this reveals its merely formulaic nature, lacking any actual political value. On the other hand, in three other cases, the *corroboratio* is in place, and so are the ducal signature and seal, but the documents were not yet valid, because they lacked secretarial signatures and notes of registration. This means that it was *these last elements* that actually validated a document, and not the marks of the authority representing Francesco. This fact clearly downgrades the actual significance of the *corroboratio* as a political statement.

The second element I have focused on is the ducal signature. Francesco's signature shows a clear graphic centrality in the final make-up of letters patent, and also represents his only autograph mark on this kind of documents. As a consequence, its absolute importance and authenticating value seems obvious. But was it? The ducal signature is almost never mentioned in the *corroboratio*, even though it is nearly always present in early-aborted documents. This combination of factors, together with additional interesting evidence surfacing from the *Sforzesco* archive (see p. 241), has prompted me to advance the hypothesis—already emerged in dealing with letters close—that pre-signed papers regularly circulated in the chancery. This deprives the signature of its primary function—that of testifying that the putative author of the document actually saw and approved it. Furthermore, the fact that the *corroboratio* does seldom mention the signature suggests that when it does not do so, the signature was decisively more symbolic than functional.

The third element I have focused on is the ducal seal, which undoubtedly was a very powerful tool, but—despite bearing the name and coat-of-arms of the duke—underwent a very collective use. Indeed, as we have seen, the secret chancery had a 'seal-keeper' clerk subject to a specific set of regulations, and the *Ordines* clearly betray a strong anxiety about the handling of the seal, whose physical possession could trigger tensions between the dukes, their counsellors and chancery secretaries. Even the *corniola secreta*—the signet-ring that the Sforza dukes theoretically kept with them at all times to seal the most important documents—could easily be lent to some of the most prominent secretaries. Therefore, the ducal seal certainly cannot be considered as a mark of the duke's *personal* authorship on the documents bearing his name.

The fourth element I have focused on are secretarial signatures. Their role looks marginal in the final make-up of the document: indeed, the signatures are never mentioned in the *corroboratio*, and they are often even physically hidden under the *plica* made at the bottom of letters patent. However, once again, the analysis of the making of letters patent contradicts this exterior appearance. Firstly, secretarial signatures, unlike the ducal signature, are always duly reported in the registers in which letters patent were transcribed—thus implying that the presence of secretarial signatures was necessary, while that of the ducal signature could be accessory. And secondly, unfinished letters patent typically bear the ducal signature *but not* secretarial signatures, a circumstance implying that it was the latter that held an actual validating value. But even when the opposite occurred, and we have unfinished letters patent bearing secretarial signature and lacking the ducal signature, we nonetheless obtain precious material evidence of

something we had already grasped in Chapter 3: the making of documents resembled a jigsaw, an often extemporary process following mostly unregulated patterns, highly dependent on specific circumstances.

The final element I have examined has been illumination, the documentary feature that seems beyond doubt the most self-celebratory of the ducal authority. I have debunked this misleading appearance by showing that the Sforza chancery often issued *non-illuminated* diplomas, and left the possibility of decorating them to their recipients. The latter either accepted to do so following their own agendas of symbolic-political promotion, or refused to do so, thus implicitly lessening the prestige of the duke who had issued the diploma. In any case, illumination ended up being the opposite of what it looked first glance: not the culmination of the sovereign's celebration, but the epitome of his necessity to negotiate his authority with subjects.

To sum up: the *corroboratio* narrating Francesco II's solid command of the process of document-making is essentially false; the actual validating value of Francesco's signature is highly relative, with only rare exceptions; the ducal seal, which bears the name and the emblem of Francesco, was used collectively, even in its most private version (the *corniola secreta*); secretarial signatures, despite their apparent marginality, were in fact more important than the ducal signature for authenticating documents; letters patent could be constructed following multiple procedures, and not a stable and hierarchical one; and finally, illumination, far from representing the celebration of unchallenged ducal power, was the emblem of the complexity of the relationship between Francesco and his subjects. All these elements considered, what remains of the original message of the document/monument? Its de-construction, recommended by Jacques Le Goff, has proven truly revealing. Francesco, omnipresent in the make-up of documents, almost disappears in their making. This does not necessarily mean that he was not there at all; it means that his authority was a factor among many others, for how important his influence may have been.

With this overview on the contradictions between the make-up and the making of letters patent terminates my material analysis of Francesco II's chancery documents. Since it has been a very *micro* analysis, focusing on minute details of letters close and letters patent, it is now appropriate to conclude Part III with a series broader considerations reconnecting us to the *macro* problems and hypotheses of this dissertation.

Conclusion

At the end of the thorough investigation of chancery practices carried out in Part II, I came to the conclusion that Sforza wordpower—the power of producing and spreading the written word of the duke—presented two fundamental characteristics that are undetectable with a standard analysis of the chancery's abstract structures and rules. Firstly, the use of wordpower was not only a prerogative of Francesco II and his inner circle, but also a collective and social resource. Secondly, wordpower, even when it was actually managed by Francesco and the Sforza leadership, was not only a merely political-administrative functional asset, but it primarily had a strong symbolic and representational value.

The objective of the third part of this thesis has been to find a substantial reflection of the collective and representational character of wordpower in the physical aspects of chancery products. Even more ambitiously, I hypothesised that an interpretive material analysis of chancery products—which I labelled 'new diplomatics'—could allow us to refine the understanding of the fluidity of chancery practices. More than an 'objective,' I defined this task as a 'challenge,' because at first sight, the principal characteristic of chancery products is their formal impermeability to the socio-political processes and tensions surrounding their making. I think that I have overcome the challenge: I have been able to demonstrate that such impermeability is only apparent. Indeed, chancery products—more specifically, in my case studies, letters close and letters patent produced in the chancery of Francesco II Sforza—do bear visible traces of the complexity and plurality of their making, and the message they convey with their form and materiality is often more important than that of their contents.

To begin with, the question of the collective character of wordpower, which translates into the question of documentary authorship. On the one hand, the official authorship of chancery products invariably looks strictly individualised—'Francesco II in person addresses his recipient,' 'Francesco II in person grants/authorises/orders something to someone.' On the other hand, scrutinising the form of chancery products means realising that their individualised authorship was in fact remarkably elastic and plural.

Firstly, regarding letters close, I have showed the great extent to which the individual authorship of Francesco II could be open to sharing, and be largely independent from his person. Thanks to the analysis of a number of micro case studies, I was able to establish that, as a matter of fact, letters that do not bear at least one

substantial statement written with the hand of Francesco do not guarantee his presence behind their making.

Secondly, through the peculiar occasion offered by the survival of a corpus of unfinished letters patent, I have questioned the actual authenticating value of two documentary features theoretically highlighting Francesco II's control of the process of document-making—the *corroboratio* and the ducal signature. Furthermore, I have also underscored that the ducal seal, despite symbolically representing Francesco, was in fact a tool of collective use at the disposal of the chancery as a whole; and I have drawn attention to the fact that illumination was a device often commanded by the recipients of letters patent, even though, in their final make-up, it looks like the one that celebrates the unchallenged authority of the sender (Francesco II) more peremptorily. Generally speaking, I have highlighted that letters patent could be assembled following different procedures, depending on highly contingent circumstances. As a consequence of these facts, I have concluded that the authorship of letters patent could be outstandingly collaborative, and that Francesco could often have little (or even nothing) to do with documents bearing his name.

Mentioning Francesco II's name, it is worth noting that the role of the ducal signature is one important element for which the material analysis of documents augments our knowledge of chancery practices. Indeed, by studying the multi-staged process that both letters close and letters patent underwent during their making, it is possible to establish with certainty that only seldom the signature of Francesco played a functional role in the documents where it appeared—that is, the function of proving that Francesco himself had seen and approved the document he was signing. To the contrary, the role of the ducal signature was very often symbolic. If written in a secretarial hand, the signature signified that the document in question was coming from a rather undefined Sforza orbit, characterised by a very extended conception of ducal authorship—which, for example, could include the Senate, an institution Francesco did not control directly. If written by the hand of Francesco, we have seen (in the epistolary relationship with Bernardo Cles and Isabella d'Este) that the signature stood for a very important sign of respect; however, it could also easily belong to a pre-signed paper (or parchment,) and thus did work as a meaningful symbol of its 'proprietor,' but with little (or any) actual pragmatic function.

The largely symbolic character of the ducal signature introduces the issue of how the representational character of wordpower is reflected in the materiality of chancery

products. As far as letters close are concerned, I have explored such issue by analysing the surprisingly detailed strategies through which Francesco II micromanaged his use of autography. He had three 'degrees of autography' to choose from: autograph signatures, substantial autograph statements, and full holographs. I have demonstrated that his choices were not casual (as they may look at first glance,) but followed regular patterns of behaviour, dictated by precise circumstances. What is crucial, however, is that Francesco's autograph interventions—holographs and statements—in all their calculated variety, have one major thing in common: they tend not to put/add substantial contents in/to the letters in which they are performed, but nearly always express very basic and simple concepts, often redundantly. Therefore, Francesco—and, presumably, his correspondents—regarded the performance of the act of writing with one's own hand as in itself meaningful. When autography was used extensively, a letter close, well before conveying a message, had the aim of representing its author, as if it were a 'textual self-portrait.'

As for the representational character of letters patent, the recap can only be very concise, because I have just offered a detailed summary of Chapter 6 (pp. 256-259). The whole chapter has had the aim of de-constructing the formal monumentality through which letters patent, regardless of the juridical act they establish through their strict contents, aim at conveying the idea of an absolute and unchallenged ducal authority from which all power emanates. From top to bottom of a letter patent, illumination, *intitulatio*, *dispositio*, *corroboratio*, ducal signature and seal, *plica* hiding secretarial signatures, outstanding size and precious writing material are all assembled together to impose this idea.

Let us now put together all these considerations on the collective and representational character of letters close and letters patent: what is the reality of chancery documents that ultimately emerges? We have started from a very inflexible and compact conception of chancery documents, seen as rigid instruments expressing the will of authority—the conception shared by classic diplomatics and traditional political historians—and we have come to a totally different conception. Whether characterised by a more or less individual or collective authorship, and by a more or less pragmatic or representational function, chancery documents (just like the chancery itself) assert themselves as very ductile platforms, suitable for a remarkable range of textual operations. These, in turn, remarkably extend the range of meanings that documents are able to codify and express—the conception of new diplomatics.

As it is evident, a more dynamic notion of official chancery documents implies,

almost necessarily, an equally more dynamic notion of authority. The analysis of chancery products, just as the reconstruction of chancery practices, demonstrate that from a different conception of Renaissance *written* political culture derives a different conception of *political culture* tout-court. A piece of the starting hypothesis of my thesis stated that the traces that the processes happening around chancery documents left on the documents' material body could have unfolded a more nuanced and participatory perspective on Renaissance political and institutional history: with Chapter 5 and 6, I am convinced that this hypothesis is effectively corroborated.

It is now time to abandon the overwhelmingly internal perspective through which I have studied the chancery and its documents, and analyse them from the outside. This is the last (and necessary) effort to contextualise its status, function and meaning properly.

Chapter 7 – The Chancery from Outside: Documentary Interaction

1. From the documentary strategies of the chancery to the documentary tactics of its outsiders

One of the key-approaches of this thesis has been assessing the chancery in relation to its outsiders as a means to achieve a more complete understanding of the chancery's social and political role—and that of its documents. Three examples, taken from the previous chapters, can suffice. Firstly, in Chapter 3, the realisation of the systematic inclusion of outsiders in the social and political practices undertaken in the chancery has played a pivotal role in the development of the idea (crucial to my whole argument) that Sforza wordpower, despite theoretically being an asset exclusively owned by Francesco II and his close entourage, could in fact become a very collective resource. Secondly, in Chapter 4, I have drawn attention to the fact that subjects (whether officers, communities or individuals) played an active role in the reception of documents coming from the chancery, so much so that the Sforza authorities made a distinction between the act of obeying/executing (*obedire* or *exequire*) their letters, the act of simply accepting (*acceptare*) them without taking further actions, and the hostile act of *non*-accepting letters. Finally, in the last chapter, in dealing with the decoration of letters patent, we have seen how recipients were able to transform documents issued by the ducal chancery into objects promoting *their own* socio-political agenda, instead of that of their official author, Francesco II.

These examples show how the agency of outsiders could affect chancery activities. If the chancery, when it was directly commanded by Francesco II and the Sforza leadership, undertook documentary strategies to achieve its own objectives from the inside out (or top-down,) subjects had the ability to respond with symmetrical documentary counter-strategies to achieve their from the outside, or bottom-up. Such documentary interaction is the last theme I wish to explore to conclude this thesis. The theme stands apart from the rest of my study, because it brings us to see the chancery from the perspective of outsiders, whereas until now we have either dealt with outsiders acting within the chancery (Chapter 3), or with the chancery's and government's own perspective on outsiders (Chapter 4). But the theme constitutes an integral part of my study, because the modes and outcomes of the documentary interaction between the chancery and its subjects and interlocutors clearly further problematise the status of chancery documents, the role of the chancery itself, and the nature of Sforza authority.

In order to quickly give an idea of the opposition between the Sforza chancery and

its subjects and interlocutors, in the previous paragraph I have spoken of the encounter between documentary 'strategies' and 'counter-strategies.' However, in the course of the chapter, I will use another and more significant dichotomy: the one between 'strategies' and 'tactics.' Both terms are used in the domain of the history of practices to define behaviours, but while 'strategy' defines the behaviours of the dominant and tends to express a view from above, 'tactic' defines the behaviours of the dominated and tends to express a view from below—or, to adapt the term to our case, a view from *outside* the main centre of power.¹ The aim of this chapter will be to focus on the documentary tactics enacted by outsiders, to suggest—in line with the rest of the thesis—that the divide between insiders and outsiders to the chancery was much less clear-cut than one might expect; and that the production, control and management of documentation was a field in which this divide was especially put into question.

Documentary interaction as seen from the perspective of chancery outsiders followed a full range of tactics of engagement, from the more peaceful (based on constructive cooperation with the chancery) to the more confrontational (based on open challenge to the written orders delivered by the Sforza leadership.) I will group such range of tactics under three headings—'negotiation,' 'resistance' and 'competition'—discussing for each one the most compelling evidence I found, further divided in specific issues.

As far as tactics of negotiation are concerned, I will first of all (2.1) look at petitions. Taken individually, petitions narrate of submissive subjects entrusting themselves to the lord's grace to solve exceptional issues. But were petitions really an exceptional means to orientate Sforza governance, and is their submissive language trustworthy? In addition (2.2), I will remark that the fulfilment of petitions—as well as the production of a vast array of documents—foresaw the payment of chancery fees. What effect did the existence of a 'documentary market' have on the interaction between chancery insiders and outsiders?

Regarding tactics of resistance, I will analyse (3.1 and 3.2) a number of meaningful episodes (drawn from the *Registri delle Missive*) to ask whether outsiders of every rank felt intimidated by the Sforza authority exercising wordpower, or if they were willing (and had the ability) to confront the chancery right on the field of writings.

¹ The notion of strategy to define the behaviour of the dominant was elaborated by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002); another sociologist, Michel de Certeau (1925–1986) put forward the notion of tactics in deliberate opposition to Bourdieu as a means to take the behaviour of the dominated seriously. Indeed, before de Certeau, the behaviours of the dominated were often dismissed as overwhelmingly unconscious, and 'habitus' was the term used to define them. See Burke 2008, 80-81.

Halfway between negotiation and resistance, the Sforza chancery coexisted with other institutions producing and deploying their documents as a practice of authority. In the fourth section of the chapter, I will describe the competition between Francesco II and the Senate of Milan as seen from a documentary vantage point. Indeed, the Senate's key-prerogative to reject or confirm the most arbitrary decisions of Francesco interestingly played out on the very body of ducal letters patent (4.1). In case of both rejection (4.2) and confirmation (4.3) of ducal decisions, the Senate had procedures devised to materially remark its rising importance directly on paper (or parchment.) What do these procedures suggest about the balance of power between Francesco and the Senate, and what do they reveal about the actual value of letters patent as emblems of the ducal authority (something that we have already scrutinised in Chapter 6)?

Finally (4), I examine a spectacular case of documentary forgery as an instance of 'appropriation.' What does the outsiders' ability of imitating documents and practices of power tell us about their attitude towards the authority? And, vice versa, what does the reaction of Francesco II against the counterfeiter tell us about the attitude of the authority towards such skilful imitation?

2. Negotiation

2.1. Re-thinking the role of petitions

When analysing the memoir *Informazioni sulle incombenze dei segretari ducali* and the political chancery practices it revealed, I highlighted how the author of the memoir considered the reception of information as an important aspect of the secretaries' work (pp. 108-109). He identified the chancery as a receptive hub, a centre whose output is largely determined by previous input *from the outside*. If receptivity is taken as a parameter for understanding the functioning of a chancery, then the role of petitions in early modern governance deserves a specific analysis. Petitions represented the most widespread instrument through which subjects made contact with the authorities.

Petitions are letters which single individuals, or organised groups, sent to the authorities requesting graces, favours, privileges, or calling attention to injustices and abuses. These documents gave rise to administrative acts that led to proceedings in tribunals, magistracies, and chanceries.² Cecilia Nubola and Andreas Würigler make a distinction between 'petitions' and '*gravamina*' on one side (collective and institutional writings addressed to the authority in specific moments of political negotiation) and

2 This definition is modelled on the one provided in Nubola 2001, 35-36.

'supplications' on the other (typically resulting from individual initiative in ordinary times.³) Francesco II's chancery used the Latin term *prex* ('plea') and the vernacular word *supplicatione* ('supplication') to identify petitions, a language meant to emphasise obedience and submission. Because that is a misleading image (as I have already discussed at p. 133 discussing the 'language of obedience' defined by Covini), I will adopt the more neutral term 'petition,' widely accepted by historians writing in English on the subject.

Petitions have long been a well-known source among historians. They are the most abundant (sometimes, the only) source signaling the existence and agency of socio-political groups that do not belong to the tiny elite producing medieval and early modern documents.⁴ Moreover, as Harriet Rudolph notes, petitions are a prominent example of 'symbolic interaction,' i.e. 'the reciprocal exchange of actions between the members of a society, carried out within a communicative process conducted on the base of shared symbols, rituals, and interpretive models.'⁵ For these reasons they can be studied from a variety of angles: the history of justice, social history, religious history, but also anthropology, linguistics, and political philosophy.⁶

During the last thirty years, two major realisations have changed the scholarly perspective on petitions, from a unilateral concession the authority graciously granted to subjects to a much more complex tactic the subjects had at their disposal in order to dialectically influence decision-making.⁷ The first realisation is that petitions, despite the apparent exceptional nature of the favours they sought, were in fact one of the most long-lasting and widespread pillars of Ancien Regime governance. We can take mid-fourteenth century Bologna as an early example: here, almost the entire political-administrative activity of the city seems to have been based on the sole management of petitions under the lordship of Taddeo Pepoli (1337–1347);⁸ much later, in the eighteenth century, as Cecilia Nubola reports, an anonymous account of the organisation of administration of the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza still suggested that 'those who think to do away with

3 Nubola and Würgler 2002a, 7-8.

4 Würgler 2001, p. 11 for the expression 'tiny elite.'

5 Rudolph 2002, 548 [my translation]. For this definition, Rudolph refers to Blumer 1996, 1.

6 Nubola and Würgler, 2002a, 7-8 and bibliography cited there.

7 *Ibid.*, 10. Zaret 2000, 81-100. 'No communicative practice for sending messages from the periphery to the center had greater legitimacy than petitioning' (p. 81); 'Contemporaries held strong views on the right to petition. (...) Invocation of tradition lays at the core of contemporary thinking on the right of subjects to express grievance 'in a petitionary way' and of the duty of officials to receive petitions.' (pp. 86-87).

8 Vallerani 2009, 419-422.

petitions would overthrow the entire system of the State.⁹

Moreover, language of obedience and submission that permeates petitions has been shown to be largely fictitious and instrumental. Just like in the language of governance I have analysed in the *Registri delle Missive* (pp. 132-139), and in the simulation of Francesco II's authorship carried out by his secretaries and by the Senate (pp. 169-179), such language responded to strictly tactical needs that had little to do with the actual position of the writer(s). Hence, as Rudolph puts it, 'submitting a supplication entailed more forms of action than the term itself would suggest—to *supplicate*, to implore. In supplications one did not just ask or implore; one haggled, negotiated, solicited, threatened.'¹⁰ With respect to this, David Zaret interestingly argues that using a language of self-diminishment long remained the only means available to subjects for entering a 'restricted model of political communication that derived from organic-patriarchal worldviews,' but this was not in contradiction with their right to petition.¹¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, in her seminal work on pardon tales in sixteenth-century France, has famously extended the idea of fictionality to the whole narrative that is to be found in petitions.¹²

This growing deconstruction of the rhetoric of petitions has had a strong impact on our interpretation of pre-modern statecraft. Anglophone historiography in particular has included petitions among the cornerstones of a more inclusive view on early modern politics, considering them as an instrument of 'public access' to power at the 'origins of democratic culture.'¹³ Yet, the acknowledgement of a mature negotiating potential of petitions has been confined to seventeenth-century England (mostly in connection with the Civil War,)¹⁴ with only few exceptions that do not venture earlier than the mid-sixteenth century.¹⁵

However, it is important to stress that such evolution was possible mainly because the use of petitions had been functioning already, and for a long time, as a tactic that *de-*

9 Nubola 2001, 35.

10 Rudolph 2002, 518. For similar statements, see Nubola and Würigler 2002a, 10; Vallerani 2009, 430-431.

11 Zaret 2009, 182.

12 Zemon Davis 1987.

13 Dean, 2002; Zaret 2000.

14 Fletcher 1981, Ch. 6; Ashton, 1994, Ch. 4; Walter 2001.

15 Kümin and Würigler 1997 and, more specifically, Hoyle 2002. Zaret specifically considers the 1640s as the real turning point in the history of petitioning. According to him, it was during this decade that petitions abandoned their traditional deferential language, became overtly critical towards the law and public authority in general, and began to circulate in print—thus entering public ceremonial and contributing to the rise of a proper public opinion. Zaret 1996. Cited and summarised in Knights 2005, 114. On the connection between petitioning and public ceremonial, see Id. 1993.

facto collectivised the exercise of power, albeit covertly. From this point of view, the chancery of Francesco II represents a very interesting case study to grasp how petitions made Sforza governance consistently participatory as early as at the beginning of the sixteenth century. What I wish to carry out here, then, is a comprehensive assessment of the volume and management of petitions during the reign of Francesco. What do they tell us about the relationship between authorities and subjects, and more specifically about the role of the chancery, i.e. the place that materially received and dealt with petition? And what do petitions tell us about the ways in which subjects viewed the chancery and more generally Sforza government?

One first element that stands out is how frequently petitions are mentioned in the *Registri delle Missive*. Indeed, letters emanating from the centre (Francesco II and his entourage) to the periphery (peripheral officers, subject communities, individual subjects) often responded to petitions. Around half of the registered letters mention petitions (see Chart 7.1, p 270). This means that, in practice, around half of the registered Sforza governance was driven or at least initiated by subjects who wrote to the authority requesting—and obtaining—further political action via the chancery.

Therefore, subjects (individuals or groups thereof) did not see the chancery only as a 'transmission belt' processing requests coming from above (the sovereign and his circle,) but also as a centre of mediation taking care of affairs coming from below. This resulted in what we can describe as a veritable tactical partnership, one which was embodied in the *Registri Ducali*, because many of the entries are nothing more than the re-phrasing of petitions into authenticated chancery documents. As seen above (p. 219), letters patent often incorporate the entire text of a petition, only adding the sovereign's *intitulatio*, a very short introduction (for example: 'We have received a supplication from the *Magnifica* Countess Beatrice Stanga, reading: [petition text],')¹⁶ and the necessary formulae and solemnities. Technically called *rescritti* ('rescripts'), these documents were extremely diffuse. They could concern any kind of act, from the more routine (safe conducts, minor dispensations) to the more exceptional (major concessions and graces). Rescripts show how the chancery had a markedly social profile (working bottom-up) that added up to the authority-commanded one, controlled by the duke and his secretaries (working top-down.) As in the investigation of social practices in the chancery, we face the inherent contradiction of a supposedly 'secret' institution that was in fact remarkably accessible.

¹⁶ DDS 91.

Chart 1

I took two months (normally January and June, other months when either January or June were missing) for each year represented in the registers, and I counted the ratio between the total number of outgoing chancery letters and those explicitly citing supplicaciones and preces as 'starters' of the letters themselves. Then I summed the single results and divided the total by eighteen (i.e. the number of months included in the chart). The chart is also useful for giving an idea of how many missives the chancery sent each month.

The figures are very reliable between 1523 and 1525, because they are calculated on months marked by intense communication between centre and periphery; the situation changes from 1530, when (as highlighted in Chapter 1, p. XX) such communication strongly decreased. It is worth noticing that these estimates are conservative, because I did not count as originating from petitions letters that were clearly written on the basis of outside prompts (for example those beginning with the words 'we are informed that (...)') but do not explicitly refer to a supplicacion or a prece.

<i>Registri delle Missive</i>	Date	Petitions	Letters	Ratio
220	January 1523	94	187	50,26%
220	April 1523	38	77	49,35%
221	June 1523	21	49	42,85%
221	January 1524	8	25	32,00%
221	June 1524	15	40	37,50%
222	June 1524	31	72	43,05%
221	June 1525	33	47	70,21%
222	June 1525	99	128	77,34%
223	August 1525	124	162	76,54%
224	January 1530	6	13	46,15%
224	June 1530	4	15	26,66%
225	June 1531	6	19	31,50%
225	January/February 1531	9	11	84,61%
225	June/July 1532	4	8	50,00%
225	January 1534	2	27	7,40%
225	June/July 1534	12	23	52,17%
225	January 1535	4	9	44,44%
225	June 1535	4	9	44,44%
			Total:	48,16%

It is worth noticing that in Milan, the proximity between society and chancery found a significant spatial expression in the urban fabric. Indeed, the 'petitioning society'¹⁷ and the 'rescripting chancery' were close by. Until the mid-1470s, the chancery was housed at the *Corte dell'Arengo*, facing on the Cathedral square (*Piazza del Duomo*), itself a documentary centre, with an army of professional *scriptores supplicationum* ('supplications writers') ready to profit from the need of the Milanese (including illiterate people) to get their motions authenticated.¹⁸ Regarding this point, I would speculate that the same Milanese probably never really accepted the choice (eventually made under duke Galeazzo Maria, but prepared since the times of his father Francesco I) of moving the Sforza court from the *Corte* to the isolated castle of Porta Giovia, located at the north-western edge of the city. Not for nothing, one of the few mentions of the Sforza in Machiavelli's *Prince* is to blame duke Francesco I for the transformation of the castle into a haughty princely residence attracting more contempt than reverence.¹⁹ The physical distancing of the Sforza from the heart of Milan was not only a symbolic message of distrust for the city, but also a concrete obstacle to the sharing of power and wealth the population demanded from the dynasty.²⁰ Petitioning, too, probably became a less immediate and more difficult tactic after the dukes' displacement in Porta Giovia. For the period of Francesco II we lack robust data, but it is easy to imagine that the chancery came back somewhere in the *Corte dell'Arengo* between 1522 and 1525, as the castle of Porta Giovia was unavailable—initially under French control (until April 1523), and then too ruined by years of wars and sieges to host the seat of Sforza government. After March 1531, the chancery must have re-settled in the castle together with the whole Sforza court.

Finally, it must be pointed out that the negotiation between chancery and society arising from the management of petitions was not simply an undesired concession that the authority accorded to their subjects. If, on the one hand, subjects considered petitioning as a unique chance to secure the Sforza's support in their claims, on the other hand the Sforza authorities *needed*, and *were eager*, to get involved. Indeed, beyond the rhetoric of the documents, involvement was not just a matter of mercy and generosity, but a vital political opportunity. Petitions implied the acknowledgement of his legitimacy, and they opened spaces for manoeuvre that would have otherwise been out of reach, either for

17 'A Petitioning Society' is the title of a chapter of Patterson 1993, 55-76.

18 Grossi 1996. On the practice of delegated writing in the pre-modern age, see Petrucci 1989; Hebrard 1995; Bouza 2001, Ch. 2; Caldelli 1996. More recently, scholars have also discovered the relevance of delegated writing in the modern age: see Lyons 2014.

19 Machiavelli 1988, 75-76.

20 On the idea of redistributive economy, very important in the medieval and early world world, see Guerzoni 1999, especially 334-355.

political reasons (without a petition, Francesco II would have been unable to intervene in a given affair) or for informational reasons (Francesco II may not even have known about the affair in the first place.) Therefore, by establishing itself as a hub for petitions, the chancery gained a continuous flow of incoming information that certainly helped the Sforza leadership to get a sense of their own dominion. Scholarship has observed this mechanism also in other regimes, such as early-modern- and modern England and India, where the state used local (and often unofficial) intermediaries to gather useful information.²¹ Going back to early-sixteenth-century Milan, it was through the reception of petitions that the chancery came to know the existence of previously unknown pro-Sforza factions in remote valleys around Lake Como. These factions wrote to Francesco to claim a fairer treatment in the face of the fact that Sforza officers sent from Milan were threatening entire villages with retaliation, regardless of their inhabitants' behaviour during the conflict with the French.²²

2.2. *The market of documents*

If the benefits of a partnership between authority and subjects in the form of a well-run petition system were mutual and political, the chancery also had a cogent reason to be accessible despite its asserted secrecy: money. The 'soft power' of influence, network, patronage certainly was fundamental to petition successfully and to obtain rescripts—as the *Ordines* forbidding clerks and coadjutors to act as mediators on behalf of their acquaintances demonstrate very well (see p. 105). However, it is important to always bear in mind the basic fact that the fulfilment of petitions (and document-making in general) was often a payment service, and money constituted the petitioners' 'hard power' to bid for paperwork—a very convincing tactical weapon.

Outsiders knew that documents may have always been on sale. Indeed, secretaries, clerks and coadjutors were entitled to a share of chancery profits, and this made them directly interested in negotiating with petitioners and other interlocutors, as well as in chasing those who 'forgot' to pay their dues—like the newly-appointed lecturers of the University of Pavia, who apparently refused to make contact with the chancery after collecting their privileges in 1523.²³ Secretary Giovanni Simonetta, in his *Rerum gestarum Francisci Sfortiae commentarii*, claims that chancery personnel competed for managing the system of petitions, one of the most remunerative activities available;²⁴ and

21 Higgs 2004, 36-58; Bayly, *Empire and Information* 1996.

22 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, I, 31, 1522 October 18 and 23.

23 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, II, 255-256, 1523 April 18.

24 Covini 2002a, 116, n. 19.

as we have seen (p. 54) in 1464 Cicco Simonetta temporarily dismantled the judicial branch of the chancery at the death of its first secretary, Angelo da Rieti, because he wished to control the flow of money that came with petitions. And indeed, the entries of the registers in the hands of da Rieti are typically annotated with the amounts paid by the recipients of the rescripts.²⁵

Generally speaking, in marketing documents, the distinction between regular payments, friendly tips and unlawful bribes was likely to be minimal. As Kathryn Burns puts it while dealing with Seville's *Casa de la Contratación*—the 'House of Trade,' built in the sixteenth century to house the production and preservation of administrative writings related to Spanish transatlantic commerce—what we define as 'corruption' was in fact an accepted part of business; Peter Burke, too, has asked whether 'corruption' is 'a label used by members of so-called bureaucratic societies to dismiss other ways of organi[s]ing political life,' citing a study of Linda L. Peck on early Stuart England that does not treat corruption as an infraction to rules, but rather as a specific trait of pre-modern political culture.²⁶ The fact that money circulated informally in the Sforza chancery is testified by the *Ordo* for the ushers. As in the case of the norms analysed in Chapter 3, we find a theoretical principle followed by exceptions that allow us to glimpse what happened in practice. As a rule, ushers were forbidden to demand an extra fee for themselves upon the issue of documents, and they were also bound to devolve any tip they may have received to the chancery treasurer, who could give them something back to his liking. However, secretaries could allow the ushers to demand the extra fee, and when privileges and concessions 'of value' were issued the ushers did not even ask for the permission to do so.²⁷ What shows through is a half-informal, half-unregulated situation. On the one hand, following distinctively Renaissance cultural mandates, the recipient of a document—especially if well-off—had to demonstrate *liberalitas* and *magnificentia* by generously tipping humbler chancery members;²⁸ on the other hand, the same recipient probably risked enduring a sort of mild racketeering. As for bribes, the registers recording

25 *Ivi*; on the high prices of letters of remission in mid-Sixteenth century France ('two months' wages for an unskilled laborer, more than a month's salary for a printer's journeyman, and most of a chambermaid's dowry') see Zemon Devis 1987.

26 Burns 2010, 141; Burke 2005, 76; Peck 1990.

27 BTMi, *Triv.* 1325, f. 92: 'Item che de lettera alcuna non se possa domandare ne togliere pagamento alcuno senza licentia delli superiori, salvo de privilegi et concessione de valore, per li quali non possano ne presumano de astringere li homini ad darli se non quello fosse de loro propria volunta; et se per le altre littere gli fosse dato pur voluntariamente et senza petitione loro alcuna quantita de denari, che li debano dare illico al thesorero, quale gli dare per el sigillo quello gli parera honesto et ragionevole.'

28 See the cultural climate described in Guerzoni 1999, especially 333-340 and 352-371.

the meetings of the Sforza *Consiglio de Castello* (of which at p. 112-113) report a cleric (Gabriele Migliavacca) accusing two secretaries (Filippo Del Conte and Bartolomeo Calco) of accepting money in order to produce documents that declared Migliavacca's defeat in a court case.²⁹

In any case, the chancery normally came into direct contact (and negotiated) with the public. The fact that letters patent were marketable following both overt directives and covert interests is fascinating, because it introduces the idea of a 'documentary environment' whose characteristics changed with the financial and political situation of the sovereign and the chancery. Cash-strapped rulers like Francesco II were probably more inclined to comply with the petitions of their subjects in order to make money or to let corruption conquer the chancery in order to establish a clientele; as a consequence, periods of political instability could coincide with 'floods' of documents of dubious value. Vice versa, stable regimes were likely to produce relatively regulated documentary flows, whose products could have had currency for many years to come. Unfortunately, as far as Milan is concerned, we cannot rely on substantial sources to investigate the market of documents until the second half of the sixteenth century, when chancery fees began to be listed in print. These lists can be studied as documents for social history. The 1551 price list of the Senate chancery was issued with a preamble that scolded those officials who deceived their superiors and 'the simple people' by demanding higher fees than established—that was exactly why the price list was published in the first place.³⁰ Moreover, Mendicant friars, 'miserable people,' hospitals and *Luoghi Pii* (the powerful network of Milan's charitable trusts) were exempted from the tax on the sealing of documents, and should have therefore only paid for the documents' actual writing.³¹ There were more than twenty typologies of documents that people could have petitioned, which suggests that the practice became systematic. During the age of Francesco II the situation was probably similar, albeit less regulated.

To sum up, it is clear that subjects had many good reasons to believe that the authority would lend an ear to their requests. Whether for a basic need of information, or for reasons of political opportunity, or for money, the chancery intentionally engaged with outsiders. What I wish to remark is that such partnership, at least in the case of Francesco II, was not exceptional but systematic. The figures emerging from the *Registri delle Missive* suggest that the flow of petitions was essential for shaping governance, and for

29 Natale 1962–1969, vol. 1 (1962), 78.

30 *Ordines excellentissimi Senatus* 1743, 38-39.

31 *Ibid.*, 38.

guiding Francesco and his entourage in the elaboration of their own decisions, and in the deployment of their own documents.

3. Resistance

Having demonstrated that interaction between outsiders and the chancery was both intensive and foundational to the exercise of power, however, it is legitimate to imagine that the relationship between the parts was not always positive and constructive. If subjects considered the chancery as an interlocutor, then negotiation was only one of the possible scenarios: resistance and confrontation were also viable tactics for dealing with the authorities.

More specifically, subjects were aware of the fact that—as suggested above—the documentary flow produced by the chancery did not hold an absolute value, and decisions coming from the authorities were therefore potentially disputable. Furthermore, the limits of chancery knowledge were well known, and outsiders could either play on them, or conceal sensible information to gain leverage in the negotiations. In the following pages, I will illustrate a range of cases—all coming from the the *Registri delle Missive*—touching these issues. I will focus first on subjects engaging in documentary conflict with the authorities and then, on a more organised episode of documentary insubordination carried out by the notaries working for the *Maestri delle Entrate Straordinarie* (the magistracy in charge of financial affairs).

3.1. Documents as battlefields

It is appropriate to begin with an apparently banal case that in fact clearly shows the very relative juridical value of dispositive chancery documents, as well as the problems associated with indiscriminate documentary production. On 5 June 1531 (that is, at a time when the Duchy of Milan was slowly starting to recover from the disasters of the Italian Wars) the chancery wrote to the officer in charge of the maintenance of the streets of Milan, Giovanni Ambrogio Morigia, to annul a number of privileges granted to individuals in the past.

[W]e understand that all the major streets [in and around Milan] are in great disarray, and this happens because some *fagie* [districts of medieval origin, marking the outskirts of the city] are currently unstaffed, and also because many [people] claim they are exempt from such duties [of streets maintenance] thanks to privileges granted by us or by our predecessors. As far as the [privileges] issued by our predecessors, we say and order to you that, given the circumstances, no one, whatever his rank, should believe to be exempt on the basis of letters and privileges granted in the past (...).³²

32 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 225, l. 10-11, 1531 June 5: for the full transcription of this document, see

Privileges of exemption from collective street maintenance had been issued so carelessly under the Sforza, that it had become difficult to find non-exempt subjects. Eventually, this led to a drastic 'devaluation' of the privileges, which remained valid only if issued under Francesco II. We can also speculate that in case of uncontrolled proliferation of a certain kind of document, it was much easier to claim its possession regardless of the actual reality. Indeed, from the letter, it is not clear whether those who affirmed to hold the privileges also materially showed them to the Sforza (or municipal) officers, or just took advantage of a generally confused situation.

What is sure is that the subjects often resorted to tactics of hard obstructionism and trickery in their interaction with the authorities. Nothing demonstrates it better than a chancery letter dated 9 July 1525. This document is particularly interesting, because it brings together the issue of the chancery's lack of knowledge about the situation of the Duchy's peripheries, the question of the purely instrumental use of the petitions' language of deference, and the cheek—I cannot think of a more appropriate term—with which subjects dealt with a supposedly intimidating authority. The letter, addressed to the *Referendario* of Cremona, reads:

Because we did not know the regulations of the merchants of [Cremona], during the past days we issued a letter in favour of our Milanese merchants, authorising them to export fustian [cloth] from Cremona; but since we have been informed that such authorisation is forbidden by the said regulations, we want this order of ours to annul the former and to be observed against the authorisations that were granted because of the petitioners' importunity and malice.³³

The situation is very interesting. A group of Milanese merchants wished to profit from the export of fustian from Cremona, but local regulations forbade them to do so. To elude the prohibition, the merchants tried an ingenious (and elaborate) tactic: they wrote a petition seeking the support of Francesco II, hoping that nobody in the Sforza entourage was aware of the monopoly of Cremona on the export of its own fustian. The merchants clearly hoped to gain time for their business while the authorities (both central and local) would have amended the error. The petition must have had a state-of-the-art deferential tone because it succeeded, but its language (as the chancery later reckoned) was completely instrumental. The Milanese merchants probably made profits before the chancery contacted the *Referendario* of Cremona. Moreover, either the merchants sent their petition under false names, or they clearly doubted that the authorities would punish them for their audacity. In any case, subjects knew remarkably well the weaknesses of the

the Appendix section, document n. 6.
33 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 234, 1525 July 9: for the full transcription of this document, see the Appendix 1 section, document n. 7.

authorities they interact with.

Among these weaknesses, one that gave subjects great leverage in their disputes with the authorities was represented by the *littere contradictorie* ('contradictory letters'), i.e. the chancery issuing two (or more) conflicting decisions on a single question. This issue, as we have seen in Chapter 3, originated in the chronic lack of coordination between the various Milanese chanceries—which testifies once again to the existence of more, mutually independent documentary flows—and it was so serious that Cicco Simonetta used it as the main argument in re-writing the *Ordines* sometime after the death of Francesco I Sforza.³⁴ *Littere contradictorie* created wearying clashes, because subjects knew they had the legally valid chance to resist the pressure coming from the centre, damaging its authoritativeness. A very telling example of this comes from a chancery letter dated 15 January 1523, and addressed to one Giovanni Giacomo de Busti (his capacity is not stated:)

The noble Cesare Pelizono, our *Referendario* in Pavia, tells us that it was customary for his predecessors to always collect the money belonging to our *Camera*, coming from all the fines and the condemnations done in that city and territory; and now, [Pelizono tells us] that you [de Busti], in the shadow of a letter of ours, usurp such office, and refuse to yield it to him (...); we order that, from now onwards, you must let the *Referendario* collect the said fines and condemnations, and this despite any letter that we conceded to you, which letters we revoke and annul; [we order you to] hand back to the *Referendario* the book of the fines and of the condemnations, that you must have with you (...).³⁵

The situation is intricate, and it is worth describing it step by step. On one side, we have *Referendario* Pelizono claiming, on the basis of *custom*, a prerogative—collecting money from fines and condemnations—that he should have logically held by *right*, since he was the Sforza representative in peripheral territories for what concerned financial affairs. on the other, we have de Busti exercising the same prerogative, apparently without the title to do so, but (crucially) in possession of a chancery letter that made his position strong enough to confront Pelizono. In this confusion, the chancery decided to annul its letter to de Busti and to rule in favour of the custom boasted by Pelizono. But did the chancery even have any memory of its earlier letter? And, in turn, could it verify the existence of such custom in its archive? Similarly to the previous case, subjects look

34 ASMi, *Carteggio Estero, Venezia*, 1315, undated (but circa 1466): 'Ultimo me pare sia da havere una grande et bona advertentia circha lordine de le lettere et de la cancellaria, per che in molti lochi se fano lettere cossi per vostra Excellentia [duchess Bianca Maria] quanto per lo prefato Vostro Illustrissimo figliolo [duke Galeazzo Maria], et per diversi cancelleri et secretarii et facilmente poteriano accadere de le cosse contradictione per non saper luno quello che facia laltro, per il che me pare se voria sopra de cio fare qualche regule et ordini, ad cio che inconvenienti et contradictione non potessero accadre [sic].'

35 ASMi, *Registri delle missive*, 220, l. 119, 1523 January 15: for the full transcription of this document, see the Appendix 1 section, document n. 8.

skilled at making their own case assuming that it was possible to trick the chancery.

The final episode I would like to discuss sees Francesco II and the chancery in greater difficulty. On 1 November 1522, the chancery wrote to the *Maestri delle Entrate Straordinarie*:

We understand that in Monte di Brianza, in the parish of Incino and its surroundings, there are many rebels who, pretending to hold safe-conducts, reside in our state and also enjoy their [properties] as if they had been loyal to us, whereas they were [loyal] to our enemies. Therefore, because we do not want them to remain unpunished for their wrongdoing, we order you to investigate these people thoroughly, and to confiscate all their goods on behalf of our *camera*, notwithstanding any safe-conduct they hold coming from anyone, unless [the documents] are issued by us and signed with our own hand (...).³⁶

Here, we find an apparent connection between the loss of control over an area (the parish of Incino and its surroundings, bordering with Venetian territory and traditionally averse to the authority of the Visconti and the Sforza) and the loss of control on (or even knowledge of) the documents circulating there.³⁷ Having had intelligence of unidentified rebels holding equally unidentified safe-conducts, the letter describes the scenarios the chancery considers plausible—that is, it indirectly tells us what the chancery expects the rebels to have concocted. Firstly, the chancery writes that safe conducts coming from *anyone but the duke* are not valid, thus admitting the possibility that someone else (local institutions? An influential local figure?) was issuing documents that were *de-facto* recognised around Incino, even though they may have been strictly speaking illegal. Secondly, the chancery points out that the safe conducts *must bear the duke's signature* to be considered valid, thus admitting at least two other possibilities: one is that the same Sforza chancery issued safe-conducts without the duke's personal authorisation—more than likely, as demonstrated in Chapter 6 (pp. 241-242); the other is that the rebels were forging ducal documents, a tactic that (as we shall soon see) cannot be discounted either. Each of the three possibilities demonstrates that the central authorities lacked the resources and knowledge necessary to control the documentary landscape and, so, to hold a tight grip on their dominion.

3.2. Battling insubordinate notaries

In the last episode, the chancery wanted the *Maestri delle Entrate Straordinarie* to cooperate in information gathering. It may appear strange to entrust a financial institution

36 ASMi, *Registri delle missive*, 220, c. 44, 1522 November 1: for the full transcription of this document, see the Appendix 1 section, document n. 9.

37 The toponyms 'Monte di Brianza' and 'Incino' no longer exist. Monte di Brianza was a confederation of local communities located some 50 kilometres North-east of Milan; the parish of Incino corresponds to the town of Erba. For the peculiar political status of the areas, see Beretta 1911 and Zenobi 2013.

with the political task of chasing anti-Sforza rebels, but the *Maestri* were in fact one of the better-informed bodies operating in the Duchy of Milan. The reason for this is simple: the *Maestri* were meant to channel extraordinary income to the ducal *Camera* from the confiscation of valuables and estates of rebels. Charting political opponents and their properties foresaw a great deal of intelligence including, from a documentary point of view, the continuous compilation of lists and inventories, together with a great interest for notarial records. The confiscation of goods was one of the pillars of Ancien Regime governance: despoiling the assets of dissenters to reward partners and allies was one of the most effective ways to create (factional) consensus.³⁸ During regime changes, the role of the *Maestri* became more important than ever, because the acquisitive behaviour of sovereigns was at its peak: on one hand opponents abounded, on the other building political consensus was crucial.

However, as we have learnt throughout this dissertation, the unity of institutions can never be taken for granted, least of all during periods of turmoil. The loyalty of the *Maestri* and of their apparatus to Francesco II was always in discussion, and instability crucially involved the management of records. It may well be only a coincidence, but it is nevertheless a fact that the first two letters transcribed in the earliest *Registro delle Missive* deal with a striking case of documentary conflict. In the first letter, on 18 September 1522, the chancery wrote to the *Maestri*:

To fix the disorder and the damage to our affairs caused by the notaries working for the [*Maestri delle Entrate Straordinarie*], we write them the attached letters, which we want to be read at your [that of the *Maestri delle Entrate Straordinarie*] presence; we order you (...) to make sure that within four days the said notaries give to our dear *Rasonati della Camera Extraordinaria* and also to our *Referendarii Generali* the authenticated inventory of all the existing and confiscated goods and condemnations that find themselves among their records (...) so that it may be possible to take action against the debtors, and draw up the appropriate writings.³⁹

At first sight this letter simply points to a simple bureaucratic inefficiency: the notaries working for the *Maestri* were slow in transmitting their paperwork to the *Rasonati* and *Referendari*, so some generic ‘debtors’ remained at large. But the second letter, addressed directly to the notaries—i.e. the above-mentioned ‘attached letter’ which the chancery wanted to be read in the *Maestri*’s presence—throws a different light on situation:

Our dear *Referendarii Generali* advise us that they are experiencing huge difficulties in acquiring the estates and goods of the rebels that are due to our *Camera*, because the writings [concerning those estates and goods] are not in their possession (...). And

38 For Milan during the sixteenth century see Maifreda 2010.

39 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, l. 1, 1522 September 18: for the full transcription of this document, see the Appendix 1 section, document n. 10.

they say this is because you [i.e. the notaries working for the *Maestri delle Entrate*] do not want to hand over the inventory describing the goods confiscated to the rebels—as it is your duty; and we find this very hurtful and displeasing, because it greatly damages us, and we are stunned that you take such small care of our *bursino* [treasury? literally little pouch] (...).⁴⁰

Firstly, the generic ‘debtors’ of the first letter prove to be rebels. And secondly, what looked like ordinary inefficiency is re-framed as a deliberate tactic of resistance on the part of the notaries (‘you *do not want* to hand over the inventory’). These elements combined reveal a politically-charged situation: some sections of the apparatus supervised by the *Maestri* were intentionally impeding the gathering of information, probably because they wished to protect the rebels. But while the protection enjoyed by the rebels of Incino—analysed at the end of the previous sub-section—seemed to have a local basis, here the opposition to Francesco II was rooted at the core of the central authorities. Francesco and the chancery were certainly alarmed, because the tone of their message is unusually blunt (especially if compared with the language of governance analysed in Chapter 4:) the letter threatened the treacherous notaries with expulsion from office and a monstrous fine of five-hundred golden ducats.

During the following years, the Sforza leadership would continue to claim rights on the documentation preserved by recalcitrant notaries. In January 1523, for example, Milan lamented the ‘hiding’ (*occultatione*) of notarial documents of interest to the *Camera* all over the Duchy.⁴¹ And on 1 August 1531, the chancery contacted the *Pretore* of Pavia:

Because of some extreme needs of ours, we are forced to try every means in order to obtain some money without disappointing anyone; hence, you will immediately order your notaries (...) to hand over all the fines and condemnations relating to financial affairs, and the confiscations of goods carried out until now (...).⁴²

It is worth noticing that in this case the chancery looks almost apologetic: it seems to treat as an exceptional favour something that the Sforza leadership should have claimed by right.

4. Competition

The behaviour of the *Maestri delle Entrate Straordinarie* suggests that ‘documentary resistance’ to authority was not limited to individual (or groups of) subjects, but occurred

40 *Ibid.*, ll. 1-2, 1522 September 18: for the full transcription of this document, see the Appendix 1 section, document n. 11.

41 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, l. 141, 1523 January 27.

42 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 225, l. 19, 1531 August 1: ‘Per li extremi nostri bisogni siamo constretti di procurare ogni via possibile per potersi senza iniuria di alcuno prevalere de qualche summa de dinari, pero senza dilatione comandareti alli notari vostri civili et criminali che sotto pena de scutti ducenti da essere applicati alla camera nostra vi debbano subito consignare tutte le multe e condemnationi pecuniarie e confiscationi de beni fatti da qui indreto (...).’

also at an institutional level. This is a reminder that the ducal chancery did not have a monopoly on the management of documentary flows; in fact, any political-administrative body with an established jurisdiction could compete for prerogatives, these latter entailing the exercise of wordpower—a strong documentary presence. From the early 1500s, the Senate set itself as the greatest institutional novelty in the Duchy of Milan (see above p. 31), and the depth of its impact can be usefully assessed from a documentary point of view.

In this section, I will examine the documentary competition between Francesco II and the Senate. More specifically, I will focus on the institutional process of 'interination' (*interinazione*) whereby the Senate rejected (or approved) decisions coming from Francesco, working directly on documentation provided by the ducal chancery (4.1). I will take into consideration one case of rejection (4.2) and one case of approval (4.3) in order to analyse how the actual balance of power between Francesco and the Senate found representation in the interination process. The results of the inquiry on interination will also allow me to resume and enrich the arguments I made in Part III on the extended authorship of ducal documents, and the source criticism on documents-monuments developed in Chapter 6. But before getting to the core of the analysis, it is worth summarising the main steps and reasons of the rise of the Senate. Indeed, we have repeatedly come across this institution throughout the dissertation without actually focusing on its history.

4.1. The rise of the Senate and the right of interination as a documentary ceremonial

The Senate of Milan was founded by king Louis XII in November 1499, at the beginning of the first French domination (1499–1512).⁴³ Throughout the twentieth century, historians have mostly considered the foundation of Senate as the mere unification of the two Sforza *Consiglio Segreto* and *Consiglio di Giustizia* mainly because the new assembly had the political-administrative functions of the former and the judicial functions of the latter.⁴⁴ More recently Stefano Meschini has challenged this view, maintaining that the Senate was modelled on the then-flourishing French regional parliaments and boasted several characteristics that had little (or nothing) to do with the

43 For a full analysis of the Edict of Vigevano—the document that established the institutional structure of Milan and its Duchy under the French—see Meschini 2002, 30-47.

44 The essential book on the Senate remains Petronio 1972: Petronio supports the idea of a Senate with strong Sforza origins. Another more recent, valuable book on the Senate is Monti 2003—see pp. 48-63 for an overview of the Senate's functions.

Sforza political tradition.⁴⁵ In addition, the French saw the presence of the local assembly as a means to compensate the destabilising potential of a 'foreign' domination like theirs. The Senate was retained after the return of the Sforza, but the key-point is that it was meant to represent a distant king rather than to assist a present duke, and was therefore devised as largely autonomous and independent—this made for a high potential of competition.

Nevertheless, the Senate grew strong enough to survive the French, and this put both Massimiliano and Francesco II in a very difficult political situation. In fact, the dukes inherited a very cumbersome assembly that in theory could have guaranteed a form of political stability, but in practice had based its success right on the *disappearance* of the Sforza, and on the occupation of their former spaces of manoeuvre. The choice was between dismantling the Senate or finding a balance to coexist with it. Massimiliano attempted to eliminate the Senate, and this was probably one of the reasons for his fall. Hence, when Francesco and Morone took power in 1522, they were keen to retain the assembly right at the centre of their projects.

The *Constitutio* issued on May 1522 (which made public the new governmental system of the Sforza restoration, see p. 31) described the re-erection of the Senate as a unilateral act of ducal authority. The crucial passage regarding the Senate displays as many as four imperative dispositive verbs: 'we order, establish, proclaim, and decree, that there will be one only supreme Magistracy, or supreme council, in all our Duchy and dominion.'⁴⁶ However, it is clear that Francesco II and his party were too weak to impose the new institutional order of the Duchy out of their sole will. Despite being formulated as the resolute decision of Francesco, this measure indicates the need to yield power to other political players in exchange for consensus.

The fundamental tool the Senate maintained in the passage from the French to the Sforza was the right of interination, i.e. the power of rejecting or approving some of the more controversial decisions of the sovereign (or of the governor who acted on the latter's behalf.) It was, evidently, an especially powerful tool, and in fact it was to become one of the major bones of contentions in the political struggles between the Senate and Spanish governors during the second half of the sixteenth century.⁴⁷

When and with what results the Senate exercised the right of interination certainly

45 Meschini 2008, 145.

46 Landus 1637, 145: 'Ordinamus, sancimus, edicimus, ac decernimus, quod unus tantum sit supremus Magistratus, sive supremum consilium in toto nostro Ducatu, et Dominio Mediolanensi (...).'

47 See Sella 1984, 43-48.

is a relevant issue, but what is important for my analysis of documentary competition between institutions is *how* the Senate exercised it. Indeed, interination represented a delicate institutional process based on the partly ceremonial handling of writings. The Sforza chancery generated paperwork related to the ducal decisions that were to be scrutinised by the Senate, and transmitted it to the Senate chancery, which in turn worked with the assembly to prepare a response, whether positive or negative. The outcomes of this procedure were significant, because they offered the chance to test the strength of the contenders. But before the case-by-case outcomes, how significant was the functioning of the procedure itself? This has never been studied, but it can provide some meaningful insights into the relations of power between Francesco II and the Senate.

In order to answer the question, we have to go through the archival series analysed in Chapter 6, the *DDS* and the *Cimeli*. Here, five letters patent show the material signs left by the procedure of interination, thereby enabling detailed reconstruction of that procedure as composed of four stages. First, the secret chancery produced a letter patent in its entirety (fig. 7.1, p. 285), and transmitted it to the Senate. Secondly, the Senate examined the act and, if it found its legitimacy uncertain, forwarded the document to an office called *Fiscus*, with the request for technical advice regarding the act's conformity to legislation; a secretary of the Senate noted the request on the back of the document (fig. 7.2, p. 286). With the name *Fiscus*, the Senate chancery referred to the *Avvocati Fiscali* ('fiscal lawyers'), a group of officers that assisted the public authority throughout financial disputes.⁴⁸ Thirdly, a member of the *Fiscus* answered the Senate's request, writing a second note underneath the first, with a motivated response. (fig. 7.2, p. 286). Finally, in case of approval, the chancery of the Senate issued a document that corroborated the measure originally taken by the duke (fig. 7.3, p. 287). Chart 7.2 (p. 284) sums up the procedure for the five letters patent I examined.

As is clear from the unfolding of these four steps, the Senate carried out an actual 'conformity check' on Sforza documents, seeking technical and legal advice from one of the Duchy's central magistracies. From the content of the letters patent, it can be argued that the Senate stepped in when Francesco II acted arbitrarily in according graces (as in *Cimeli*, 17), redistributing confiscated estates and the income deriving from duties (*DDS* 13, *DDS* 72, *Cimeli* 60), or granting concessions and immunities (*Cimeli* 45). It is important to point out that the response of the *Fiscus* was not binding. The *Avvocati Fiscali* offered their legal expertise, but they always ended their notes stating that the

48 Covini 2007, 43-44.

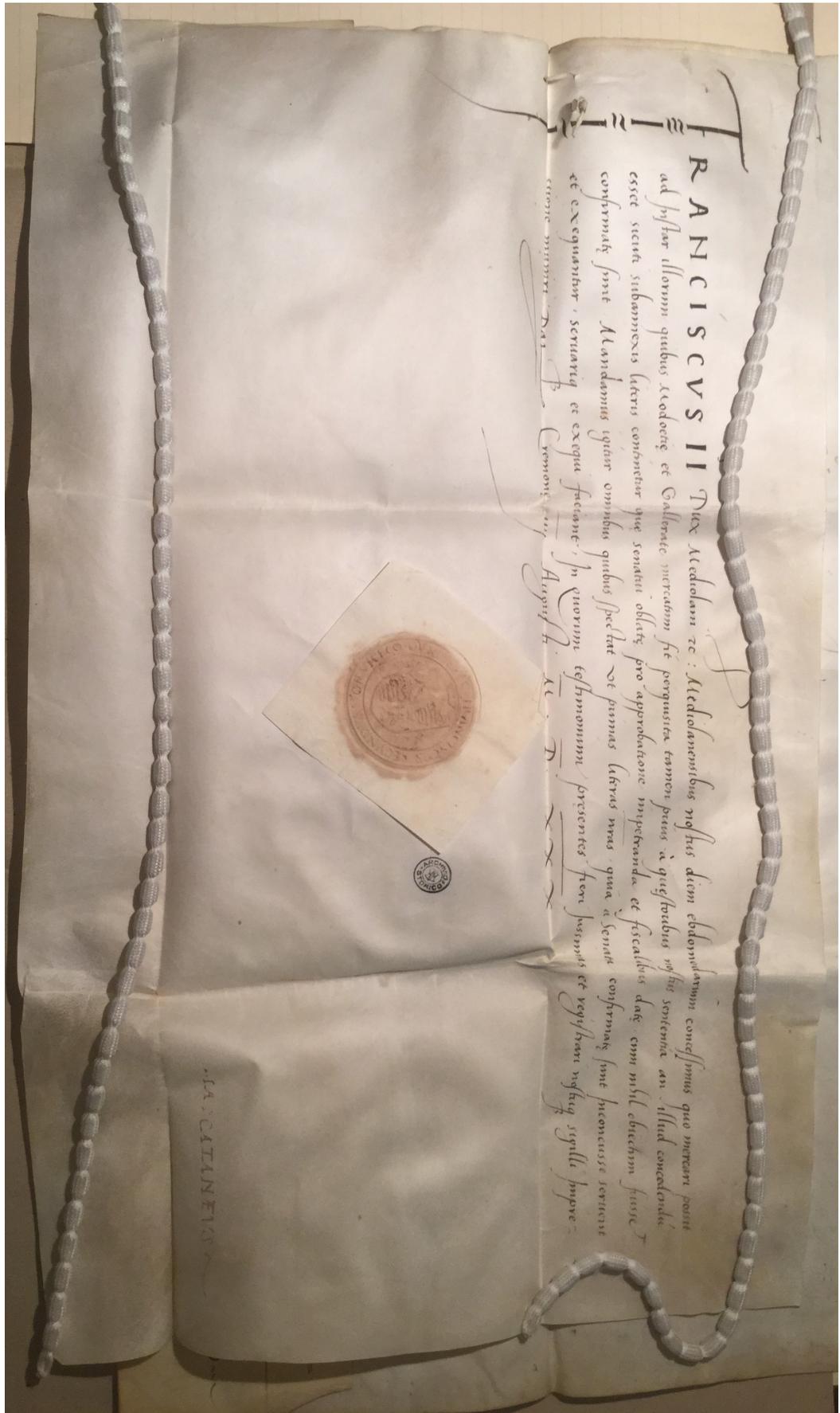
Chart 2 – Interination procedures

	Reference	Type of juridical act	Step 1: Date of the document	Step 2: Date of <i>Fiscus</i> advice request	Step 3: Result of the advice	Step 4: Interination
1	<i>Cimeli 17</i>	Grace	1523 Apr 26	1530 Jun 21 (?)	Negative	Negated
2	<i>DDS 13</i>	Donation	1524 Sep 30	1525 Mar 18	Positive	n. a.
3	<i>Cimeli 60</i>	Donation	1525 July 7	1525 Jul 7	Negative	Negated
4	<i>Cimeli 45</i>	Concession	1530 July 19	1530 Jul 27	Positive	1530 Aug 4
5	<i>DDS 72</i>	Concession	1533 Dec 13	1533 Dec 15	Positive	n. a.

M. D. XXX. Die Mercurij. xxiii. Julij
 Letua approbacione p^{ri}ncis Gracia d^{omi}n^o i^{ste} cam Fiscalibus
 dari debere ut uideant si quid opponendu sit
 IA: CATANAEVS

Cū ista Mag^{ca} ciuitas tantis infortunijs
 affecta sit, multūq; sit de p^{ri}nc^{is} mo^o ex^{mo}
 p^{ri}ncipe benemerita, merito hoc sibi
 tribuendu fuit: eapp^o Fiscus, cui nihil
 opponendu occurrat, se remittit p^{ri}nc^{is}
 Senatui
 Dia. Mar.

Fig. 7.2: Notes on the back of *Cimeli* 45 (Sforza chancery letter patent). The first note (top) was written by the secretary of the Senate Giacomo Cattaneo (*Ia: Catanaeus*); the second note (bottom) was written by a member of the *Fiscus*, Diamante Marinoni (*Dia Mar*)



F R A N C I S C U S II Dux Mediolani etc. : Mediolanensibus nostris dilectis eorumdem concessimus quo mercari possit
 ad ipsar illorum quibus Rodorig et Gallense mercatam se perquisita tamen prius a quibuslibet nostris sententia an illud concedenda
 esse sicut subannexis litteris continetur que senatus oblati pro approbatione inspectanda et fiscalibus date cum nihil eorum fuerit
 confirmati sunt Alardanus igitur omnibus quibus spectat de prius litteris nostris quia a senatu confirmati sunt hinc inde sententia
 et exequantur serventur et exequantur in quovis eorumdem presentibus tenentibus et regibus nostris sigillo imper
 romane imperatoris Da. P. Comone eius Augusti. H. de. T.

LA CATANENSIS

Fig. 7.3: Cimeli 45 – Senate letter patent

Senate was to have the final call on the matter. Therefore, the Senate made a political (and not simply technical) inspection leading to the approval or rejection of decisions taken by Francesco.

Equally revealing is the *form* of this supervision. Indeed, the documents submitted to the Senate were fully-validated original documents. The negotiation between chanceries on a specific measure could have easily happened exchanging drafts, with the *Fiscus* assisting as third party. By contrast, interination was set as a 'documentary ceremonial' in which the Senate made a solemn judgement directly on letters patent, i.e. the supposed objectification of ducal authority. With the expression 'documentary ceremonial,' I wish to echo the Michèle Fogel's *Les cérémonies de l'information* on early modern France.⁴⁹ In her book, Fogel maintained that the ceremonials through which information and decrees were published by the authorities in early modern France constituted a fundamental political moment. In her account, the study of these ceremonials enhance our understanding of the nature and the goals of French royal authority. A similar case can be made for early-sixteenth century Milan, with regard to this specific side of communication between Francesco II and the Senate. The modes of the passage of documents from the Sforza chancery to the Senate chancery always followed the same 'ritual'—this is why they can be considered a ceremonial—and were devised to have a distinct political value.

The Senate let the Sforza chancery produce a finished charter—with all its solemnities and bureaucratic requirements—before *physically* acting on the charter itself, by marking its back with the signs of the interination procedure. This fact is significantly paradoxical. On the one hand, Francesco II made a document/monument whose implicit ideological purpose—as analysed in Chapter 6—was that of expressing an idea of *unilateral* and *unchallenged* imposition of authority. On the other hand, however, when the procedure of interination unfolded, the document/monument was materially handled by the Senate for *scrutiny*, and possibly for being *rejected*, which constitutes a contradiction in terms.

In the following pages, I will analyse in detail two letters patent of the *Cimeli* series (*Cimeli* 60 and *Cimeli* 45) that underwent the interination procedure, one with a negative and one with a positive response. This allows me to illustrate in detail the modes of the competition between Francesco II and the Senate; furthermore, seeing ducal letters patent from this perspective allows additional considerations on their monumental nature,

49 Fogel 1989.

and on the problems associated with their authorship.

4.2. The case of letter patent Cimeli 60: a document-monument resists its 'demolition'

From a material point of view, letter patent *Cimeli 60* is, by all means, the grandest piece of evidence I encountered during my research. Firstly, with its 54 centimetres of width and 44,5 centimetres of height, it is the biggest; secondly, it is made of a remarkably resistant, yet elegant, type of parchment, almost intimidating to handle; thirdly, and most importantly, it bears a pendant seal held in a lavish brass box, finely decorated with the Sforza arms sided by the bucket and burning logs on one side, and with the *colombina* (literally 'little dove,' another typical Sforza emblem) on the other. On a visual level, *Cimeli 60* certainly deserves its modern status as *cimelio* (memorable), or—as we have been repeatedly defining letters patent like this—of document/monument, celebrating the authority of Francesco II (figg. 7.4, 7.5, 7.6, pp. 290-292).

This is confirmed by the patent's contents. On 7 July 1525, Francesco decided to donate to Ferdinand of Avalos, Marquis of Pescara, the estates around the town of Alessandria previously confiscated from some anti-Sforza rebels, the sons of one Galeazzo Trotti.⁵⁰ As the principal lieutenant of Charles V in northern Italy, Avalos was one of the most important figures in Lombardy at the time. The letter patent makes clear that the donation was a reward for Avalos ejecting the French from the Duchy of Milan, a few months after the victorious battle of Pavia. Hence, Francesco, at the apex of his political stability, was elegantly acknowledging the aid of a valorous imperial captain. The situation looks absolutely unproblematic.

However, as soon as we push ourselves beyond the overall narrative and the most basic data of *Cimeli 60*—author, object, and beneficiary of the juridical act—we begin to notice a number of complications. For example, the text states that the confiscated estates that Francesco II was donating to Avalos had already been granted to a Senator, Giacomo Filippo Sacchi. As a consequence, in order to make the new donation, Francesco not only had had to annul the previous donation to Sacchi, but also three fifteenth-century eviction decrees (*decreti de evictione*) that prohibited such an arbitrary move. On the one hand, Francesco tried to bolster his authority by pointing out that he was acting out of his own will, exercising his full and absolute power (*proprio motu et de nostrae potestatis*

⁵⁰ The inventory of the *Cimeli* fond and the file in which the charter is enclosed, actually put 1526 as the year of issue, probably because after the date 'MDXXV' there is a mark that could well resemble an additional 'I.' However, Ferdinand of Avalos died on December 1525, and the charter bears the signature of Girolamo Morone, who was arrested in October 1525 and never re-entered the Sforza court. Therefore, 7 July 1525 is the correct date.

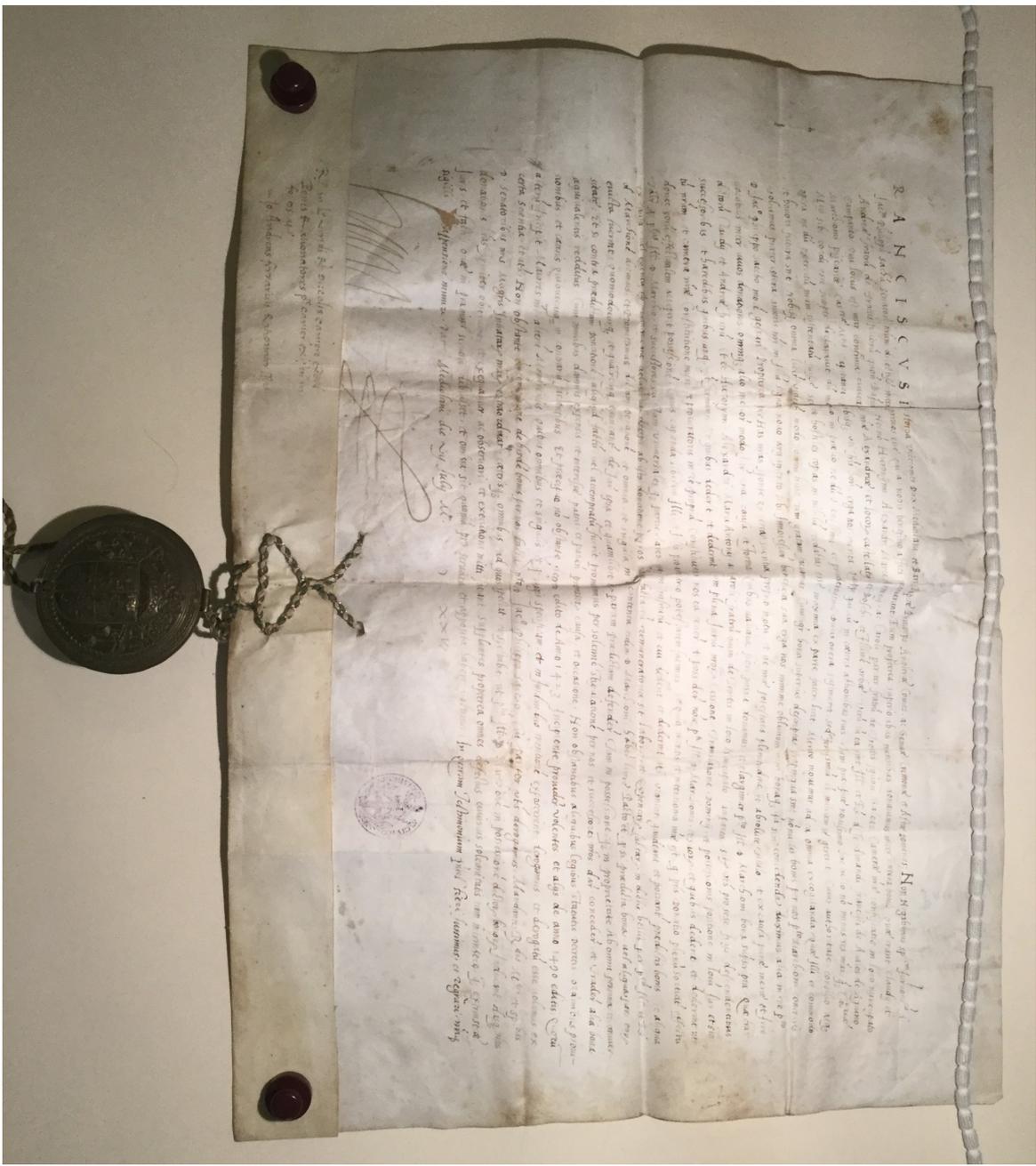


Fig. 7.4: Cimeli 60



Fig. 7.5: Front of the brass box containing the pendant seal of *Cimeli* 60, decorated with the Sforza coat-of-arms sided by the emblem of the buckets and burning logs



Fig. 7.6: Back of the brass box containing the pendant seal of *Cimeli* 60, decorated with the Sforza emblem of the *colombina* ('little dove')

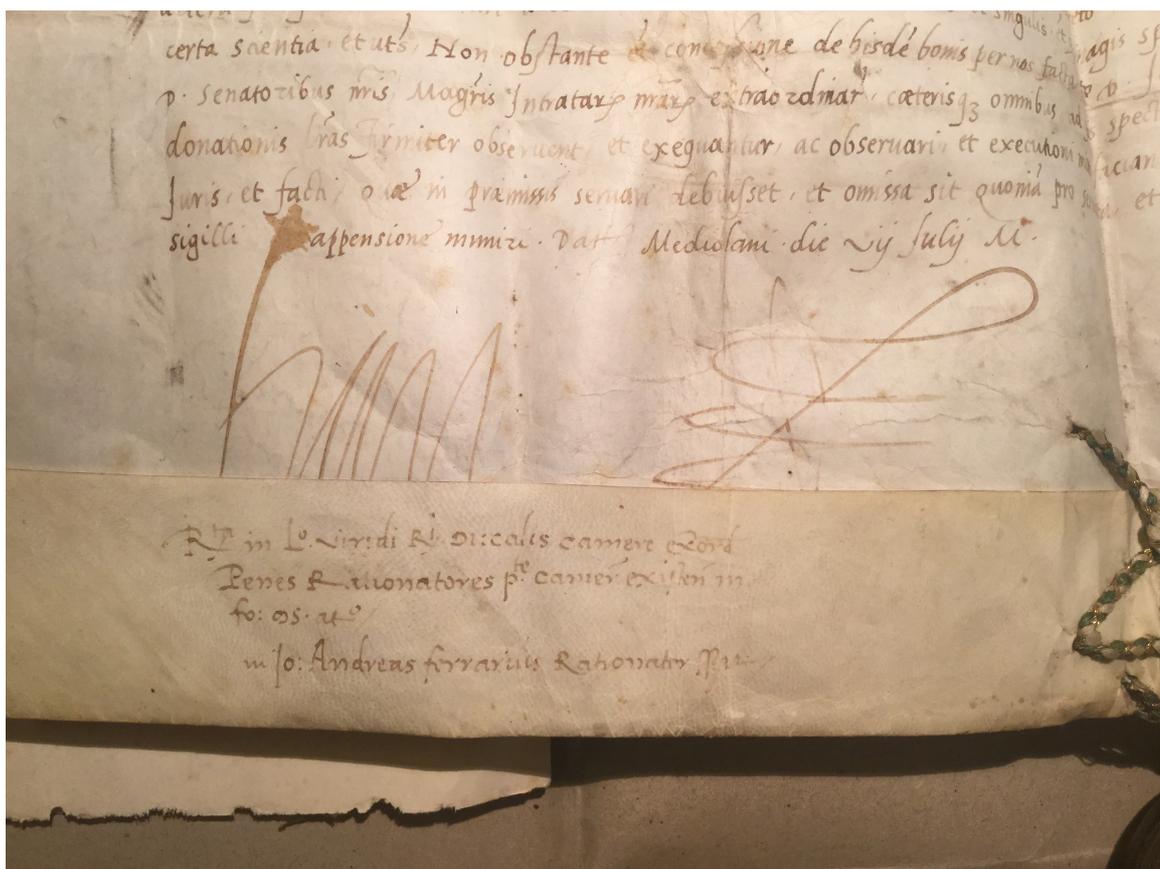


Fig. 7.7: Signature of Francesco II on *Cimeli* 60. The blank space between the words *sigilli* and *appensione* suggests that the charter's scribe did not want to overwrite the signature. Therefore, the charter may have been signed *before* the writing of the *tenor*

plenitudine et absolute titulo).⁵¹ On the other hand, he clearly expected trouble from the Senate. Indeed, a clause in the document stated that Avalos would have received other estates of the same value, had the donation been invalidated. Thus, competition and uncertainty were inbuilt in the document itself.

The fears of Francesco II were justified. The man he was depriving of the previously-granted estates, Giacomo Filippo Sacchi, was a powerful and influential figure. We have already briefly encountered him (pp. 55-56): one of the most prominent members of the Senate, he would soon become its President in 1528, and would hold that post until his death in 1550. Going against him, for a weak duke like Francesco, was pretty unreasonable. So why risk such a daring operation? A hypothesis could be that the estates confiscated to the Trotti brothers constituted the only prize worthy of a key-figure like Avalos, and Francesco felt forced to sacrifice Sacchi's interests in the short term, however problematic this choice may have been. Maintaining a good relationship with a lieutenant leading a foreign army right on the territory of the Duchy of Milan was crucial, because soldiers' abuses were common and potentially disastrous.

Moreover, there is a tiny but important material detail right on the body of *Cimeli* 60 that further complicates the scenario. Indeed, the huge signature of Francesco II overlaps with the last line of the text, but the text does *not* overwrite it (fig. 7.7, p. 293). The writer wrote the first word of the last line, *sigilli*, but then realized that he could not write the following one, *appensione*, without overwriting the signature. The word *appensione* was then written after the signature, leaving a wide blank space. Therefore, Francesco may well have signed a blank parchment—indeed the *corroboratio* mentions no signature, the importance of the act notwithstanding—and the details of the donation were negotiated only later in the process of document-making. So who did actually set the terms of the donation? Francesco, someone in the chancery, or maybe Avalos himself dictated them from his political and military position of strength? Once it is clear that the personal signs of validation were either scarcely relevant (the signature), or a collective tool in the hands of the chancery (the seal), we cannot overestimate the agency of the declared author of a letter patent.

Paradoxically, it may well have been the precariousness of the situation that determined the very solemn form of *Cimeli* 60. In an attempt to satisfy a recipient (Avalos) that could not be disappointed, and to present the Senate with a *fait accompli*,

51 For the use of this juridical and rhetorical device, see Black 2009. Black argues that ‘in Francesco [II]’s hands, plenitude of power was applied with less attention to established conventions (...) [plenitude of power] was now used for deficiencies of all kinds, including mere technicalities’ (pp. 184-185).

the solemnity of the act was purposely thought to be inversely proportional to its legitimacy. In addition to the impressive material features analysed above, the letter patent had already been dated, registered in the books of the *Camera*, and signed by *Gran Cancelliere* Girolamo Morone and first secretary Bartolomeo Rozzoni. In other words, it was as if the ducal chancery had full and exclusive control on the issue of the donation. However, this was not the case.

The solemn make-up of the charter did not impress the Senate, which stepped in very quickly, physically obtaining the charter for scrutiny on the same day it was issued. Indeed, a secretary of the Senate chancery (named *Ravazolus*) wrote a note on the back of the donation: ‘1525, day 7 July, evening. Before giving the sought-after approval, the *Fiscus* shall see and oppose [the donation].’⁵² It is worth noticing that the Latin verb used for ‘oppose’ (*opponere*) has no neutral nuances: the Senate was not asking for advice, but rather requesting a motive to quash the whole business. A *Fiscus* officer (named *P. Paulus*) obliged and duly summarised a series of legal reasons invalidating the donation.

We do not know how this confrontation between Francesco II and the Senate ended. Indeed, in the *Cimeli* series, there are no other documents indicating whether the conditions the *Fiscus* suggested for concluding the deal were accepted by the parts, or further negotiated. What is sure, however, is that the afterlife of this document contradicts its tormented history. The *Cimeli*, just like the *DDS*, is a showcase series set up to glorify the authority of those sovereigns or institutions that issued its documents. But in the case of the donation to Ferdinand of Avalos, the archivists selected the exact opposite: a letter patent that, behind its impressive appearance, had had its very production and outcome disputed between many parts. Francesco and his chancery, the Senate and the *Fiscus* all materially acted on the donation, while Ferdinand of Avalos and Giacomo Filippo Sacchi probably directly influenced its making and undoing. Eventually, the letter patent survived its own juridical ‘demolition,’ at least in the eyes of later observers. This is yet more proof that documents-monuments—as I argued in analysing the unfinished letters patent of the *DDS*—were conceived for conveying an image of themselves that do not match the tension behind their production.

4.3. The case of letter patent *Cimeli* 45, and the letters patent of the Senate

The Senate did not show its influence only in opposing unwelcome measures by Francesco II and his party. Even when interination ran smoothly and there was no reason to confront the duke, the Senate was eager to remark its authority on a documentary level.

⁵² ‘1525, die 7 iulii, vespera. Antea devenire ad petitam approbatione, fiscus videat et opponat.’

This is the case of *Cimeli* 45, a rare file preserving not one but *two* letters patent, physically bound together. The first is the duke's concession to the city of Milan of the right to hold a tax-free weekly market; the second is the Senate's confirmation of the concession (figg. 7.1 and 7.3, pp. 285 and 287).

In this case, the interination procedure took place uncontroversially. The Sforza chancery issued the ducal letter patent on 19 July 1530 and the Senate examined it eight days later, on 27 July. A secretary of the Senate forwarded the concession to the *Fiscus* with the following note: 'The approval of this grace has been requested. It has been said that [the concession] must be forwarded to the Fiscal [lawyers], so that they can judge whether there is something to object'—this statement being evidently much more compliant than the one used in *Cimeli* 60.⁵³ The fiscal lawyers found the act fully legitimate. Surprisingly, they did not provide a legal motive for justifying their approval, but rather a political (and even slightly emotional) one, claiming that Milan deserved the concession as acknowledgement for the accidents endured during the recent wars.⁵⁴

The establishment of a market in the city must have been perceived by the Milanese as a much-awaited sign that the dreadful devastations of the previous decades had come to an end. This is so true that even the journal of brothers Giovanni Giacomo and Giovanni Pietro da Fossano—two notaries who recorded memorable events taking place in Milan from the early 1500s up to 1559—devoted an entry to the first market-day on 13 August 1530.⁵⁵ As a consequence, the Senate not only gave the go-ahead to the ducal decision but also issued its own letter patent confirming it—possibly to *visibly* sponsor a popular act. However, it would be nearly impossible to distinguish the document coming from the Sforza chancery from the one coming from the Senate chancery if we did not know that the signature *Ia. Cataneus* at the bottom-right corner of the confirmation identifies Giacomo Cattaneo, who worked for the Senate and not for Francesco II.⁵⁶ Indeed, the Senate's letter patent imitates the one issued by the Sforza chancery. It bears Francesco's *intitulatio*, and displays the seal with his name and coat-of-

53 'Petita approbatione presentis Graciae. Dictum fuit, cum fiscalibus dari debere, ut videant si quid opponendum sit.'

54 'Cum ista Magnifica Communitas tantis infortuniis affecta sit, multisque sit de Illustrissimo et Excellentissimo principe benemerita, merito hoc sibi tribuendum fuit: eapropter Fiscus, cui nihil opponendum occurrit, se remittit Reverendissimo Senatui.'

55 The journal is still unpublished, but it represents a precious source for the events occurring in Milan during (and beyond) the Italian Wars, as seen from a first-hand perspective. BAMi, *Trotti* 422, c. 80: 'Memoria como uno sabato che fu sino [sic] adi 13 agosto 1530 si comenzo afare il mercato de bestie sopra il pasquaro de Santo Ambrogio in Milano in quello grado et modo se fa a Monza.' For some general notes on this kind of journals (also known as *libri di ricordanze*,) more numerous in Tuscany and Veneto than in Lombardy, see Mordenti 1985; Grubb 2009. For a Lombard case, see Covini 2010.

56 Landus 1637, 159.

arms. The *corroboratio* lists the usual orders to make, register and seal the document, as if Francesco had directed the process of document-making. The narrative of the text takes Francesco's point of view on the interination procedure itself. Francesco affirms that he has issued the concession, and that the Senators have examined it; since they have made no objections, he issues the confirmation of the concession.⁵⁷ If we accepted such narrative passively, the situation would be slightly paradoxical: why should Francesco have issued the concession in the first place, if he knew he needed to issue also a confirmation of his own decision?

Even the archivists of the Municipal Historical Archives were struck by this confusing ambiguity. Initially, one of them correctly wrote that the confirmation of the concession came from the Senate. Later, however, someone (or maybe the same person) amended what they thought was an error (fig. 7.8, p. 298). The results of my research allow me to affirm that the letter patent was certainly produced by the chancery of the Senate. Indeed, similarly to the case of the letters close analysed in Chapter 5 (pp. 169-174), the Senate simulated the duke's authorship in order to give form to its own documents.

To demonstrate it beyond doubt, we can turn once again to the *DDS*. Here, seven documents are signed by secretaries of the Senate: two, by the above-mentioned Giacomo Cattaneo;⁵⁸ one, by Stefano Gusperti (*St. Gusp.*);⁵⁹ two, by Princivallo Monti (*PrincivallusM*);⁶⁰ and two, by Benedetto Patellani (*B. Patellan.*).⁶¹ All these letters patent show two systematic differences with the documents coming from the Sforza secret chancery. Such differences may look minimal to us now, but they were crucial in the 'period eye' perspective of their intended recipients, especially when they needed to retrace the exact origin of the document in their hands. The first difference is in the *intitulatio*: Senate documents do bear the name of Francesco II and his title as duke of Milan, but always lack the other titles that sometimes appear in the documents of the secret chancery.⁶² However, this shortened formula is necessary but not sufficient to mark

57 'Mediolanensibus nostris diem ebdomedarium concessimus quo mercari possit (...) perquisita tamen prius à questoribus nostris sententia an illud concedendum esset (...) cum nihil obiectum fuisse confirmate sunt (...).'

58 *DDS*, 13, Pizzighettone, 1524 September 13; Milan, 1534 May 29.

59 *Ibid.*, Milan, 1531 August 8. In 1531, Gusperti defines himself as secretary of the Senate in a letter to the duke: *ASMi, Diplomatico, Autografi, Referendari*, 221, 1531 December 28.

60 *DDS*, 13, Bologna, 1533 February 13; Milan, 1534 December 3. Monti is among the secretaries of the Senate since 1527: Landus, *Senatus mediolanensis*, 159.

61 *DDS*, 13, Milan, 1535 February 15; Milan, 1535 September 9. Of Benedetto Patellani, we have the letter of appointment as secretary of the Senate: *ASMi, Registri delle Missive*, 224, l. 1, 1529 December 5.

62 Duke of Bari, prince of Pavia, count of Angera, lord of Genoa and Cremona (and, in some documents, lord of Asti).

1530. 19 Luglio
Cremona

Decreto del Duca Francesco II Sforza, col quale, considerando le
tristi condizioni di Milano in causa delle guerre, e la scurita del be-
stame in tutto il territorio, concede al comune di Milano di
tenere un mercato per i bovini in Piazza S. Ambrogio, al quale
accorda le medesime immunita di cui godono i mercati di
Monza e Seprio.

Orig. orig. prima aut. del Duca. Sig.

Munito il decreto ~~del Senato~~^{la} 3 agosto 1530 che consolida
il suddetto, dopo udito il fisco e avuta la risposta del Senato.
Orig. orig. sig.

Fig. 7.8: Envelope of Cimeli 45, describing both the Sforza chancery- and the Senate letter patent. The second paragraph begins with the words '[a]ttached [is] the decree of the Senate' (*[u]nito il decreto del Senato*), but an archivist barred the words 'of the Senate,' because letters patent issued by the Senate are almost indistinguishable from that issued by the Sforza chancery.

an incontrovertible distinction, because sometimes Sforza chancery documents also adopted it. Hence, the second and most important difference stood in the signature. Documents coming from the Senate never show Francesco II's huge signature; documents coming from the Sforza chancery always do. There is only one exception to this clear-cut divide, but it is easily explainable. On 22 October 1535, the secret chancery dispatched a letter patent that did not bear Francesco II's signature. The date is not coincidental: the duke would die a few days later, and he was probably already unable to sign with his own hand (see p. 181-182).

What emerges is a very contradictory state of affairs. On the one hand, both the substance and the form of interination prove that the Senate held a remarkable power in the competition with Francesco II. Indeed, the 'documentary ceremonial' of interination foresaw that Francesco exposed himself with the issue of fully-validated letters patent, thus offering the Senate the chance of judging them overtly, with something similar to a public trial. On the other hand, its great authority notwithstanding, the Senate still relied on the appropriation and imitation of ducal authorship in its documents, and did not coin its own documentary symbolism—like many lords did in late-medieval Italy as they wanted to emancipate themselves from the communal past of their dominions.⁶³ Finding a reason for this mismatch is not easy: probably the Senate continued to find a framework of ducal *authorship* more apt to convey *authority*. In any case, such mixture of document forms and of document producers further confirms that there existed a collective dimension of document making; that documents could materially become a battleground for the balance and competition between different powers; and that outsiders did not see Sforza authority as a rigid monolith that could be either obeyed or fought, but as a ductile palimpsest on which to introduce their own motions.

5. Appropriation: a case of letter forgery

Speaking of appropriation and imitation introduces the last section of the chapter. Until now, we have seen subjects, communities and institutions cooperating, negotiating and competing with the chancery, and occasionally resisting it. But in addition, there existed a tactic that stood out from this ordinary interaction: the forgery of documents.

If, as seen in Chapter 4, the deployment of chancery documents around the Sforza dominion was one of the most effective ways to manifest power, then counterfeiting

63 Attilio Bartoli Langeli has famously summarised the gradual transition of Lucca from a communal to a seigneurial regime through the transformation of the form of the documents issued during the 'crypto-lordship' of Castruccio Castracani degli Antelminelli (1314–1328): Bartoli Langeli 1985, 53-55. For the full study, see Mosiici 1967.

documents was a viable option to accomplish objectives. As Miriam Eliav-Feldon has effectively shown in her *Renaissance Impostors*, the practice of document-forgery was widespread, and many figures specialised in such 'profession,' like beggars known as *bianti* or *pitocchi* in Italy, or *jarkmen* in England. Not for nothing Tomaso Garzoni, in his famous *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, devoted a chapter on *bolle* (letters patent) focusing less on their lawful making than on their systematic forgery.⁶⁴ Yet, succeeding in counterfeiting a document was not just a matter of replicating an object. Since writings—as I hope to have demonstrated—drew a consistent part of their meaning from context (for example the time and the mode of their distribution,) would-be cheaters had to re-create a whole situation, and to show a deep familiarity with the communication strategies typically adopted by the authorities.

Therefore, I wish to conclude this chapter with the analysis of the most singular episode I found in the *Registri delle Missive*, a dramatic story of forgery that took place in the territory around Pavia between April and May 1523. Our knowledge of the events rests on the transcription of two chancery letters. The first, dated 30 April, reads:

We have just been informed that someone went through the territories and the villages of our Dominion, depicting our ducal arms, causing a grave damage to our subjects, and pretending to have received the commission from us; and we know that we did not issue such letter [...] we have ordered the noble Angelino de li Conti de Gambarana to investigate such fraud, and jail anyone who could be held responsible, and alert us. Now, having executed our order, the said Angelino has found that one Master painter, Battista da Marliano, went [through the Dominion] with forged letters, depicting the said arms, and has brought him to you [the *Pretore* of Pavia]; since we want to punish this infraction, we attach here the said letters, and we send them to you, with the order of interrogating thoroughly the said Master Battista, to find out the author and the accomplices of the falsification of the said letters and of the seal; and once you have instructed the trial against him [Battista], you will do against him what justice requires; and finding that the said Master Battista deserves to die for his wrongdoing, you will hang the said letters to his neck while executing him, so that he will be of example for all the others; and before doing so, you will first alert us or our *Supremo Cancellario*.⁶⁵

Counterfeiting a document in order to pretend having a commission to paint the ducal coat-of-arms on the walls of subject towns and villages: we are in front of a sort of peculiar 'meta-forgery,' forging as a prerequisite for forging. The operation set up by Battista da Marliano and his accomplices may seem too complicated and bizarre at first glance. But in fact, the offenders must have concocted their plan basing themselves on

64 For an overview on document forgery in the medieval and early modern world see Eliav-Feldon 2012, 215-217. *Bianti* and *pitocchi* are mentioned in Raffaele Fianoro's *Il vagabondo*—first edition 1621: see Camporesi 1973, 97-100. *Jarkmen* are mentioned in Kinney 1967. On *bolle*, their makers and counterfeiters, see Garzoni 1996, vol. 1, 316-318.

65 ASMi, *Registri delle missive*, 220, ll. 267-268, 1523 April 30: for the full transcription of this document, see the Appendix 1 section, document n. 12.

experience, appropriating and reproducing the methods of the authority. Indeed, Silvio Leydi points out that in the series of regime changes between 1499 and 1525, both the Sforza and the French relentlessly restored their symbolic supremacy over the public spaces of the Duchy any time they re-conquered territory.⁶⁶ The reasons for what he calls ‘auto-representative fury’ was simple: the contenders were convinced that even the sole existence of the depiction of alien coat-of-arms in their field justified enemy interferences and counter-attacks.⁶⁷ In the case of Massimiliano Sforza, we have detailed evidence on how ‘basic visual controls’—as Evelyn Welch effectively define them—were restored through ‘a saturation of images which claimed whole cities (...) as seigneurial possessions.’⁶⁸ There are notarial records testifying that the duke hired painters to methodically tour the Duchy and mark the walls of buildings with Sforza emblems.⁶⁹

Therefore, subjects probably grew so accustomed to painters showing up in their towns that some impostors could think of cheating them looking perfectly credible. This is fascinating, but it also raises two questions. Why would anyone risk a punishment for depicting the Sforza arms around the Duchy? And how could Battista da Marliano and his accomplices hope to get away with it? It is possible to make a series of educated guesses. As to why they did it, Battista and partners probably forced subject towns and villages to pay a fee for having the Sforza arms painted. Indeed, the ducal letter alludes to ‘a grave damage’ for the cheated subjects, and since the age of the Visconti newly-conquered towns were expected to paint the viper's arms on communal gates, towers and assembly halls at their own expenses.⁷⁰ As for getting away with their unlawful plan, the impostors probably counted on the fact that nobody (neither the central authorities, nor its peripheral representatives) would have bothered to chase them for a pro-Sforza demonstration. Possibly they thought that, even if discovered, they could easily negotiate with the authorities a division of the sum obtained.

However, the impostors are likely to have gone one (big) step too far when they decided to forge the ducal commission in order to pursue their goals. Indeed, Francesco II's merciless reaction to the appropriation and imitation of his documents is as significant as the tactics conceived by the cheaters. The duke may have tolerated the unauthorised painting of the Sforza arms in the dominion, even if someone else was making money out

66 Leydi 1999, 26-28.

67 As a document issued under Massimiliano Sforza declared: ‘(...) ne videatur ipsos Gallos et barbaros aliquod ius habere in ipso dominio pro existentia armorum positorum per eos diversis in locis’. Cited in Leydi 1999, 27. The expression ‘auto-representative fury’ is at p. 26.

68 Welch 1995, 6.

69 Leydi 1999, 26-27.

70 Welch 1995, 6.

of it; what he absolutely could not tolerate was the falsification of letters bearing his name, and the diffusion of such letters throughout his territories—as seen in Chapter 4, this act constituted a practice meaningful in itself. The text of the chancery letter is very clear: the *Pretore* of Pavia should have interrogated Marliano in order to discover who forged the letter and the seal, the rest of the plan being of lesser importance; and ultimately, it was for the falsification of the letters—and not for the painting of the arms—that Marliano was put to death. Francesco even came to devise a disturbing, 'living' *pittura infamante* (defaming portrait) to be staged during the culprit's agony; he should have had the counterfeited letters hanging from his neck while dying.⁷¹ The reason of this humiliation was explained both in the first (30 April) and second missive (12 May) to the *Pretore*, the latter confirming the sentence: the macabre death of Battista should have been of example for the rest of the population. No one should have ever dared to forge ducal documents. If in this episode I am insisting on Francesco's direct agency, it is because he followed the events personally. Indeed, he added an autograph statement at the bottom of both letters. In the first, the duke urged the *Pretore* to do justice as soon as possible ('Do what justice requires, and soon;')⁷² in the second one, he re-stated that Marliano's death would have discouraged future counterfeiters to follow his steps ('You will do justice, because so is our will. *Transeat in exemplum ceteris.*')⁷³

Analysing the documentary interaction between the chancery and its outsiders—a range of figures, groups and institutions ranging from local communities to the powerful Senate of Milan—allows us to further problematise the status of chancery documents, the role of the chancery itself, and the nature of Sforza government. Outsiders deployed a range of documentary tactics that acted in contrast with the chancery's strategies: 'negotiation,' 'resistance,' 'competition,' and 'appropriation.' Let us conclude with a summary of the insights gained so far.

With regard to tactics of negotiation, I have underscored—and, importantly, quantified—the massive role of outsiders' petitions in shaping government policies. I have also drawn attention to the somehow underestimated fact that the issuing of a vast array of Sforza documents was based on the payment of fees, a 'documentary market' that must have encouraged an intense cooperation between chancery and outsiders. These two

71 On defaming portraits, see Ortalli 1979. On the theatrical aspects of public executions in pre-modern London, see Dillon 2008: 122-124.

72 ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, l. 270, 1523 April 30: 'Fate quello quello vole iustitia & presto.'

73 *Ibid.*, l. 273, 1523 May 12: 'Exequireti la iustitia, che cossi è mente nostra. Transeat in exemplum ceteris.'

elements combined demonstrate that chancery documents, even though they materially bear the marks of the authority of the duke, very often originated directly from the requests of outsiders. When the Sforza leadership agreed to such requests, it did so not only for careful political calculation, but also for cogent financial reasons, and because it *needed* to reward interlocutors in order to be recognised. As a result, the chancery consistently worked as a centre for *mediation* as much as (if not more than) a centre for the top-down imposition of power. This, in turn, shows the extent to which authority could be inherently negotiated between parties.

This last statement is fully confirmed by the analysis of resistance tactics. Outsiders were more than willing to challenge the Sforza authorities precisely on the field of writings, showing no reverential fear whatsoever. At all levels—from casual subjects to smart merchants, from peripheral liaisons to central officers—outsiders show themselves aware of the chancery's 'documentary weaknesses' and were very skilled in exploiting them. It is important to stress that this made the value of official documents inherently relative and volatile, rather than absolute as we conceive it today, in our bureaucratic culture. As I pointed out above, the 'documentary environment' of Renaissance polities must have been very dynamic, and more or less stable depending on the balance of power between central authorities and peripheral forces.

As for the category of competition, I have investigated the documentary aspects of the interaction between Francesco II and the Senate of Milan. The Senate's right of interination can be seen as a 'documentary ceremonial,' during which the Senate examined letters patent issued by the Sforza chancery. This procedure had paradoxical implications. As seen in Chapter 6, letters patent are the documents/monuments par excellence, and their make-up was devised precisely for imposing a straightforward image of unchallenged authority, discouraging any form of criticism. However, the Senate scrutinised letters patent, materially handled and marked them with requests of advice from the *Fiscus*, with the authority of rejecting them even if they were already fully authenticated (the case of *Cimeli* 60): all this is yet more proof that the processes happening around chancery documents can change the most apparent meaning of documents themselves. Even in case of approval (the case of *Cimeli* 45), the Senate issued its own letters patent to corroborate Francesco's decisions, showing the importance of exerting wordpower. Once again, the nature of authority emerging from this 'documentary dialectic' is complex and multifaceted.

Finally, in recounting and discussing a peculiar case of forgery, I have argued that

counterfeiters not only had the ability to reproduce the physical features of chancery documents (the tactic of forgery probably being much more pervasive and practised than we may think,) but also knew how important it was to stage the whole performance (whose meaningfulness I have analysed in Chapter 4) of delivering them to subject towns and villages. In so doing, counterfeiters denote a deep knowledge of the strategies of the Sforza leadership; in addition, they demonstrate that they believed that, if caught, they could have negotiated the unlawfulness of their actions, thus implying that the authorities could be very flexible in their reactions.

Conclusion

With the chancery seen from outside, we have come to the end of this thesis. I have explored the chancery of Francesco II from a variety of angles: I have begun by revealing its most basic features (structure, size and hierarchy, Chapter 1), and then I have focused on some behaviours and the socio-political background of chancery members (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 respectively). Subsequently, I have focused on the social, political, and cultural practices undertaken in the chancery (Chapter 3), thus enlarging the pictures to outsiders, who (as we have seen) played a fundamental role in the very functioning of the chancery. After having established the importance of informal practices over abstract structures, rigid rules, and ideal representations, I have analysed as a performance meaningful in itself one of the chancery's chief activities—that is, the act of deploying documents around the Duchy of Milan (Chapter 4). Finally, I have shifted my focus to the material letters close and letters patent (Chapter 5 and Chapter 6), asking if and how the highly dynamic picture that has systematically emerged throughout the thesis affected the nature of chancery documents—and, conversely, if and how a material analysis of chancery documents can improve our understanding of such dynamic picture.

In these last pages, I will illustrate four main contributions that my thesis hopes to make to Renaissance scholarship, from the most particular (relating to the history of Milan) to the most general (regarding a multi-dimensional conception of Renaissance authority and power as seen from the vantage point of written political culture.) Before ending with this last point, I will also explain why my chosen case study has generated research results that may be relevant for other cities and states, even though—as I pointed out in the introduction—its major peculiarity consists in being situated in a context of crisis that was exceptional under many respects.

The most particular contribution of my thesis is a constructive re-evaluation of the Sforza restoration under Francesco II, between 1522 and 1535. With my study—the first ever to deal with Francesco II's chancery, which has entailed a remarkable amount of archival work on previously-untapped sources—I demonstrate that considering the Sforza restoration simply as a period of 'decline' is, by all means, limiting. Firstly, I have highlighted a number of elements of strong continuity between the Sforza golden age and the age of Francesco II—the overall organisation of the chancery, the resilience of the 'old boys network' of chancery members, the enduring role of the chancery as a centre of

scholarship and as a self-standing community with a civic role in Milan—which all testify to Francesco's will to act as a legitimate sovereign, his political and financial precariousness notwithstanding. Secondly, I have shown that even the elements of discontinuity—the progressive disappearance of specialised chancery branches, the appearance of alien presences in the Sforza chancery network, the decrease in volume of the correspondence with the peripheries of the duchy in the years 1531–1535—should not be interpreted (as they have been) as a 'melancholic' retreat of Francesco from power, but rather as a realistic re-positioning in the rapidly changing institutional balance of the Duchy of Milan. Actually, my claim is that Francesco and the Sforza party had an active role in fostering such new institutional balance. They established the role of *Gran Cancelliere*, promoted the rise of the Senate and the *Maestri delle Entrate*, and built a secret-chancery structure that would remain unchanged after Francesco's death. Significantly, all these institutional features would characterise the political-institutional life of early modern Milan up until the eighteenth century. Scholarship on early-sixteenth-century Milan, which has seen a substantial rise since the early 2000s, has completely ignored the role of the Sforza party in Milan's transition from the medieval to the early modern world, focusing exclusively on the history of the two French dominations, and on the dynamism of the rising Milanese patriciate and civic institutions/identities.¹ Therefore, my thesis contributes to the re-discovery of early-sixteenth-century Milan from the little-known perspective of socio-political relations and interactions.

From a methodological point of view, this first contribution of my thesis certainly is the most canonical. As a matter of fact, taking inspiration from the Italian documentary history of institutions (DHI), I have conducted a documentary history of the Sforza restoration, and I have come to the conclusions outlined above. In the process, however, I have also thrown light on two themes that the DHI, concerned as it is with abstract political-administrative structures, tends to overlook.² One is the broad social, political and cultural role of chancery members (not only secretaries, but also lower-ranking clerks and coadjutors.) As I have argued, they were veritable 'shareholders' of power, because they had strong political and economic ties with Francesco II, something which partially undermines the meaning of the official chancery hierarchy. The other theme is the importance of socio-political networks (much more than technical skills) in determining the composition of the body of the chancery members, which similarly advises against an

1 For the discussion on the achievements and gaps of the historiography on early-sixteenth-century Milan, see [pp. 35-37](#), [nn. 44-51](#)

2 For the discussion on the achievements and limits of the DHI, see [pp. 19-21](#), [nn. 12-18](#), and [p. 35](#).

overly rigid structural approach to chanceries. The insight gained from the first part of my thesis invites us to consider chanceries less as isolated institutions than as dynamic groups, regulated less by rules than by informal practices. This is why I focused on this last concept in the central part of my thesis.

This leads to what I regard as the second main contribution of my work, which can be summarised as follows. There is an elementary mechanism—the concrete act of making and delivering official documents—that, despite being absolutely basic and fundamental for the exercise of power, has been almost neglected by scholarship, in the (conscious or unconscious) conviction that chanceries were too rigidly regulated to host meaningful political and social processes. And there is a presentist bias towards chanceries, seen as bureaucratic offices at the sole disposal of well-defined authorities, that historians have not really challenged—either because they are unaware of such bias, or because they deem it as scarcely relevant. However, as a matter of fact, it is *as a result* of that elementary mechanism of power, and *as a consequence* of how chanceries concretely functioned, that today we have much of the evidence through which we know about political-institutional history (and history in general.) Therefore, we need to take chancery practices—the concrete, material processes by which official documents were made and delivered—from the margins to the centre of historical analysis. My thesis attempts to do precisely this; and it has, I hope, the potential of completely changing our perspective on what a chancery and its functions really were.

To deal with this research problem more effectively, I have coined the term 'wordpower' (defined as the will and ability to produce written documents so as to set up an interaction between the duke and his party on one side, and subjects and interlocutors on the other.) If we keep a classic perspective on chanceries—relying only on structures, rules and representations—wordpower presents itself as a tool *of* the authority (in our case, tendentially reified in 'the duke,') used by the authority with an overwhelmingly *pragmatic* aim: exercising top-down governance. This is the perspective of traditional political-institutional history. However, as soon as we focus on practices, wordpower becomes much more complex. Firstly, the *collective* dimension of the use of wordpower enriches the one strictly controlled by the sovereign and his inner circle. And secondly, the exercise of wordpower on the part of the sovereign and his inner circle acquires a markedly *symbolic/representational* dimension, to the detriment of the pragmatic one. Let us step back and review the evidence and some examples I found and used to support

these last claims. With regard to social practices, an against-the-grain reading of fifteenth-century Sforza chancery *Ordines* demonstrates that the chancery, despite being called *secreta* ('secret') was in fact systematically open to outsiders of all ranks, who could often easily meddle in chancery activities. Moreover, as far as more specifically political practices are concerned, another source (the memoir *Informazioni sopra le incombenze dei segretari ducali*) explicitly testifies that decision-making processes at the Sforza court foresaw a continuous and informal exchange—often unsupervised by the duke—between chancery insiders and influential outsiders, the authority of the latter resting on very volatile relations of power. In addition, as anticipated above, a variety of sources underscores the fact that the chancery was by no means only a centre of documentary production, but also (and consistently) a vivid centre of scholarship, and a socially-varied, autonomous community gathering around a chapel in the heart of Milan. These last two traits of the chancery may not directly affect the nature of wordpower, but are further proof that it is impossible to conceptualise the chancery as a standard political-administrative office managed by the authority as if in a social vacuum. Finally, by carrying out a critical reading of the contents and language of the *Registri delle Missive*, I have shown that the deployment of Francesco II's documents in the peripheries of the Duchy of Milan was less an exercise of actual governance than a symbolic practice—very meaningful in itself, as demonstrated by the abundant funding Francesco allocated to it—undertaken to affirm a minimum degree of jurisdiction over the Sforza dominion. As a result of this research, I have come to the conclusion that the chancery was an open and dynamic socio-political hub of information and communication, and that its main function was not only that of coercive imposition of orders coming from above on acquiescent subjects, but rather one of *mediation*. The multiple tactics enacted by chancery outsiders that have emerged in the last chapter confirm this stance very well. Subjects relentlessly tried to orientate Sforza policies through the writing of petitions, and the chancery encouraged them to do so either to gain money or precious information. The existence of a documentary market, with chancery products issued upon the payment of fees, certainly promoted a mutually beneficial exchange between chancery insiders and outsiders. Even the episodes of open confrontation between the chancery and its interlocutors can be seen as a rougher form of mediation.

The third main contribution of this thesis is, I hope, to have shone new light on the forms and materiality of chancery documents as products of lively, politically and socially

mixed, interactions. This is in contrast with the approach of classic diplomatists, who see documents in a sort of social and political vacuum. As we have seen, Jacques Le Goff overtly criticised his colleagues for having been 'too passive' before documents, accepting their most apparent monumentality without making the effort of scrutinising and deconstructing them—that is, without revealing the actual relations of power underneath their formal and rhetorical surface. I have made such effort. With an approach that I have defined as 'new diplomatics,' I have read documents not only as static finished *products*, but also as the embodiment of multi-staged and collaborative *processes*; and even when I have looked at documents as finished products, I have not treated them as mere containers of text, but as textual objects whose material forms are highly meaningful.

Therefore, I have investigated how the collective and representational character of wordpower is reflected in chancery documents. In the former case, what has strongly emerged is a question of documentary authorship. I have highlighted that, while both Sforza letters close and letters patent always propound the *personal* authorship of Francesco II, such authorship could be consistently *shared*. Having authority in the Sforza orbit meant having access to Francesco's authorship. More interestingly, though, through a series of micro-case-studies, I was able to establish the remarkable extent to which the epistolary identity of Francesco could be independent from his person. Firstly, as far as letters close are concerned, Sforza secretaries were allowed to write and dispatch letters with Francesco's autograph signature even when Francesco was physically far away from them, whether because they used blank sheets where Francesco had already inscribed his signature, or because they actually imitated it. The Senate itself, an institution that Francesco did not control directly (and with which he was often in competition) unproblematically made use of ducal authorship in its own letters. Secondly, as far as letters patents are concerned, the situation is even more fluid. I have defined these documents as 'jigsaws,' because I have shown that they were constructed through the apposition of a number of elements essential to their validation (marks of authority, formulae, bureaucratic notes,) which all nominally recalled the person of the duke, but were in fact controlled and managed by different people, and put in place without following regulated procedures. As a result, every single letter patent has its own history, and Francesco's actual 'quota' of authorship in each one varies greatly.

Moving on to the meaningful forms of chancery documents, I have dealt with two different problems—once again, I have divided my analysis to deal first with letters close, and then with letters patent. With regard to letters close, I have focused on how Francesco

II micromanaged the use of autography (choosing between autograph signatures, autograph statements, and holographs) depending on rather precise circumstances. What is clear is that Francesco was aware that the performance of his own writing (and even his writing's calculated degree of readability) was an act that was meaningful in itself, capable of changing the tone of the message he was sending. Moreover, considering the processes of authorship-sharing discussed above, the use of autography was a significant material act of authorship re-appropriation on the part of the duke. With regard to letters patent, instead, I have focused on the lack of standardisation of the charters' material form. This characteristic of letters patent clearly suggests that their form mattered. And indeed, especially in the section on the illumination of letters patent, I have shown that the design of documents often resulted from the relationship (and negotiation) between the Sforza chancery and the documents' recipients, with the latter keen to pursue *their own* self-promotional iconographic programmes.

The result of the problematisation of both authorship and materiality of chancery documents is to question their very nature. Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century scholars, following their own positivist mindset, were quick to classify Renaissance chancery products as state-of-the-art 'public records:' documents created following regulated procedures in official settings characterised by specialised functions, and by a clear separation from their outside.³ Similarly to what happened with the essentially bureaucratic notion of chanceries, scholarship has not revised this early interpretation. By contrast, my thesis decisively opens up a new perspective on the study of chancery documents. It rejects (or at least attenuates) their rigid function as official tools fully controlled by the authorities, instead insisting on their inherently fluid processes of creation and usage. In so doing, I suggest that Renaissance chancery documents have much less in common with public records as we conceive them today than with other kinds of Renaissance and early modern texts—literary and non-literary books, pamphlets, public proclamations, private letters, and so forth—whose collective and social character has been highlighted by recent and successful scholarly trends with a distinctively material orientation, such as the study of manuscript culture and scribal publication. It is my contention that future research specifically focusing on chancery documents—whether called 'new diplomatics,' as I have advocated, or otherwise—will necessarily

3 See my discussion of the early-twentieth-century construction of the *Sforzesco* archive ([Introduction](#), pp. 39-40). Or—to mention a substantial example—the monumental, state-sponsored series of domestic, colonial, and foreign *Calendar of State Papers* published in England from the 1850s. One volume is devoted to Milan: Hinds 1912.

have to engage with these trends as much as with classic diplomatics and traditional political-institutional history. As extensively explained in the introduction, chancery products need to systematically undergo the 'social-oriented' kind of material analysis from which book history has so much benefited, and that has then spread to the study of a vast array of textual objects.⁴

To conclude my point about the form of chancery products, it is worth mentioning that the question of the materiality of political-administrative documents did not matter only in pre-modern times, but recently made the news in the United Kingdom. The House of Lord's decision to end the 'thousand-year-old tradition' of printing Britain's laws on parchment from April 2016 has aroused criticism from a number of MPs, from the press, and also from part of the general public—and it may therefore be repealed. What is at stake is the durability of the writing material on which laws would be printed (5,000 years for parchment versus 200 years for standard archive paper, argues *The Telegraph*,) but also—and perhaps more importantly—the abandonment of what media outlets significantly define as a *practice* that divides opinion and provokes different reactions.⁵ On the one hand, using parchment for making records is clearly anachronistic, absurdly expensive, and also politically incorrect (given the unnecessary killing of animals.) On the other hand, though, some conservative parts of English society—hence the protests of *The Telegraph*—continue to consider the historicity and prestige of such practice as highly meaningful.

Before proceeding to the last comparative point of this conclusion, in which I discuss the most general lessons we can learn from the chancery of Francesco II Sforza, it is appropriate to anticipate an objection that could logically arise against the arguments I have made so far. How can I ground a new notion of chanceries, and a call for a 'new' diplomatics, on the basis of a case study that is situated in a period of exceptional crisis like the Italian Wars in the Duchy of Milan? In the introduction to the thesis, I claimed that early-sixteenth-century Milan, characterised by repeated regime changes and by a highly volatile political-institutional context, would have constituted an interesting 'laboratory' for doing documentary history. But how representative can this laboratory be? I wish to respond to this objection in two ways. First of all, by showing that my initial hypothesis was correct: the instability of early-sixteenth-century Milan has actually

4 For the discussion on the material analysis of textual objects other than chancery documents, [see pp. 21-25, nn. 29-39](#).

5 Hughes 2016, Mason 2016.

allowed us to get historical insights that would have been more difficult to scope, had I studied a period of stability. And secondly, by showing that it has indeed been possible to make multiple comparisons with other case studies throughout the thesis.

One first important subject that the crisis of the Sforza restoration has enhanced is the importance of socio-political networks as the elements through which the body of chancery members came to be constituted (Chapter 2). It is precisely because Francesco II's troublesome history as duke is marked by *two* radically different political projects that we can appreciate how each of those projects was necessarily supported by a different chancery network. On the one hand, the chancery network of the heyday of Francesco (1522–1525) was strongly Sforza-biased: the objective was to re-affirm the old prerogatives of the Sforza dynasty, and the ranks of the chancery were therefore filled with old-time loyalists—or their descendants. On the other hand, the chancery network of the last years of Francesco (1531–1535) reflects his will to re-position himself and his party in the political landscape of the Duchy. A number of chancery newcomers did not have any former allegiance to the Sforza. Rather, they represented the rising influence of Spanish-imperial elements in the government of the Duchy. Another glaring proof of the crisis as a revealing factor is the very existence of a fundamental source, the memoir *Informazioni sulle incombenze dei segretari ducali* (Chapter 3): as a matter of fact, the most insightful descriptive source on the golden-age Sforza chancery, cited by all the most important Sforza chancery scholars, was written in the early 1520s because of the need to remember how the chancery functioned after decades of political turmoil. Moving on to Chapter 4, it is the fact that a *disgraced* and *cash-strapped* duke like Francesco II made a great economic effort for document-delivery—regardless of the scarce political-administrative results obtained—that convincingly supports the argument that the act of deploying chancery document around the Duchy of Milan was less a functional and logistic endeavour than a symbolic (yet fundamental) practice of authority. Moreover, as far as the materiality of letter-writing is concerned, the great variety of Francesco's autography strategies is consistently caused by his unique relationship with Bernardo Cles (who had been Francesco's protector, educator, mentor, and political ally,) which in turn derives from Francesco's *exiled* years in Trent. more generally, Francesco systematically resorted to the use of autography in his correspondence with Cles and the Gonzaga because he considered himself as the *lesser* correspondent. The *debito* of writing (with his own hand) therefore fell on him. These elements were all crucial to get a clear perspective on the variety of textual practices. Finally, in Chapter 7 the study of the interination

procedure as a revealing documentary ceremonial is made possible by the fact that Francesco II is the *only* Sforza duke to have an institutional competitor as strong as the Senate to engage with. This led to the elaboration of the process of interination—and of the 'documentary ceremonial' connected to it, which in turn has given us the opportunity to obtain compelling evidence of how letters patent, supposedly document/monuments (and therefore authoritative, untouchable) were not treated as such by contemporaries.

Let us now pass to the features that place my case study within the wider context of Renaissance Italy and Europe, thus making it relevant for a broader scholarly debate. Firstly, in underscoring the importance of the social and political practices undertaken in the chancery (Chapter 3), I have worked on two sources—the mid-fifteenth-century chancery *Ordines* and the *Informazioni*—that do not refer to the age of Francesco II, but to the chancery of the previous century. As I pointed out in the introduction, scholarship typically considers this chancery as one of the most functional and 'modern' of the Italian Renaissance (especially with regard to the management of diplomatic information.) However, despite this supposed functionality and modernity, my study of practices has clearly shown that, even in the golden age, the chancery was nonetheless systematically open to the agency of outsiders. This suggests that the porosity of the chancery was not connected to exceptional forms of crisis; rather, it was inherent in Renaissance written political culture in general.

Moreover, in Chapter 4, I have demonstrated that the merely symbolic function of document-delivery was not a trait that applied only to weak rulers like Francesco II, who could not afford the actual enforcement of their own orders. Even in a 'super power' like the rising Spanish empire, officers made a distinction between the successful delivery of letters (understood as the establishment of a minimum, but often sufficient, degree of jurisdiction) and their actual execution (a desirable, but not necessary, occurrence.) The parallel between Milan and Madrid is so strong that also the terminologies used to define the distinction match: in the former case, *acceptare* a letter coming from the central authorities was different from *obedire* or *exequire* it; in the latter case, *cumplir* a letter was different from *obedezer* it. Generally speaking, I have also shown that systematic difficulties in controlling state peripheries are not to be found only in war-torn polities like the early-sixteenth-century Duchy of Milan or in trans-continental dominions like the Spanish empire, but also in the Venetian Terraferma—a manageable area controlled by one of the most powerful cities in Europe at this stage.

Turning to epistolary practices (Chapter 5), my main source of comparisons has

been Tudor England. I have mentioned Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to show that letters' recipient must have been profoundly aware of the meanings encapsulated in the non-textual forms of the letters they received, and I have shown that Lady Arbella Stuart, just like Francesco II, consciously chose between an informal and a presentation italic hand, depending on the circumstances. Furthermore, regarding the remarkably extensive sharing of sovereign authorship, I have once again shown that it was not a trait due to a particular lack of authority on the part of Francesco: Tudor poet John Skelton satirised Henry VIII (certainly not a powerless or irresolute king) for his inability to control the letters written on his behalf; and Gonzaga-scholar Deanna Shemek has drawn attention to the 'web of relations' that composed the written voice of Isabella d'Este, one of the most powerful women of the Renaissance. Shifting the focus from letters close to letters patent, I have found evidence of the use of pre-signed papers and of the collective management of the ducal seals (including the private signet-ring of the duke, the *corniola secreta*) not only for the age of Francesco II, but also for that of Ludovico Sforza—traditionally considered the most despotic and authoritarian of the Sforza dukes.⁶

In Chapter 7, I have shown that Francesco II's heavy reliance on petitions for policy-making was by no means exceptional, but can be observed in fourteenth-century Bologna as much as in the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza during the eighteenth century. In addition, the practice of gathering sensible information informally, relying on unofficial local intermediaries—as I argued Francesco and the Sforza leadership did through the reception of petitions—was not an emergency solution proper of unstable governments, but a strategy enacted by regimes in early-modern- and modern England and India. I have also highlighted that the market for documents as a strong factor of exchange between chancery insiders and outsiders can be continuously found in Milan from the mid-fifteenth- to mid-sixteenth-century; and that the blurred difference between lawful payments and unlawful bribing was common in Milan as much as in early modern Seville and London, where 'corruption' (whether in the world of trade or at court) was not perceived as an infraction to rules, but as a normal way of doing business. Finally, in dealing with the forgery of documents, I have underscored that such practice was so common as to constitute a 'quasi-profession,' not only in the politically unstable Duchy of Milan of the 1520s and 1530s, but also elsewhere, with figures specifically known as *bianti*, *pitocchi* and *jarkmen* operating all over Italy and England.⁷

6 The supposed authoritarianism of Ludovico has been recently put into question by Letizia Arcangeli: see Arcangeli 2003a.

7 See p. 300, n. 64.

Therefore, the Sforza restoration may well be considered a peculiar research setting, but this does not make it an isolated one. To echo a famous expression used by Italian micro-historian Edoardo Grendi, Francesco II's chancery constitutes the 'exceptional normal' (*eccezione normale*): a case study that may look unique at first glance, but in fact offers the chance to illuminate broad trends—especially considering that late medieval and early modern Italy was characterised by multiple comparable crises, each one generating a sheer amount of historical evidence.⁸ As I pointed out at the end of the introduction the advantage of focusing on single case studies and doing micro-history is precisely the possibility of addressing broad historical problems and re-casting some accomplished and unchallenged historical teleologies through the close investigation of well-delimited objects. In my case, the word 'object' is to be understood both figuratively (in the sense of 'subject') and literally (with regard to the physical chancery documents I have examined.)

Now that I have expounded why it is possible to establish significant analogies between my case study and other regimes, I can focus on the last and more general contribution of my thesis. With a study of a Renaissance chancery, of its documents and of the *written* political culture surrounding them, what I have in fact tried to achieve is a broader, solid, and evidence-based reflection on Renaissance *political culture* tout-court—that is, on the nature of power. As I pointed out in the introduction, one of the fundamental aims of my work was offering a first example of *cultural history of bureaucracy*. A history that does not take the documentary interface between the authorities and their subjects as a trans-historical phenomenon—immanently based on impersonality, hierarchy and rules—but rather as an excellent vantage point to grasp a number of otherwise hidden socio-political dynamics.

With regard to this, for example, my thesis provides a solution to—or a way out for—the first historiographical debate I examined in the introduction to this thesis (pp. 18-19). Let us recall it. In the late 1950s, Federico Chabod argued that the Italian Renaissance states were the first to show distinctively 'modern' traits of centralisation thanks to the early development of bureaucratic systems made of offices (with their chanceries) and officers. In response, Chabod's critics denied the actual effectiveness of such centralisation, instead focusing on the persistence of institutional pluralism, and on the importance of private networks for the functioning of political-administrative affairs. What emerges from my case study, and from a cultural-historical approach to bureaucracy

8 See Grendi 1997, especially p. 512, and Id. 1994.

in general, is that these two apparently irreconcilable views can—and *should*—be reconciled and overcome to explore a new dimension of Renaissance politics. Political-administrative writing and its government were undoubtedly central in state-building, as Chabod argued. The point, however, is that state-building by writing was not an exclusively top-down phenomenon—with the authorities imposing it on their mostly recalcitrant subjects—but also worked bottom-up, with subjects keen to orientate state-building by writing in many different ways. The fact that *chanceries* consistently functioned through socio-political *networks*, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, is perhaps the best synthesis of the seemingly antithetical stances of Chabod and his critics.

Classic political historiography, with its institutionalist view of 'the State,' tends to see power as a strictly one-dimensional entity, held by small and compact elites that impose it on masses. My thesis decisively rejects this view, as it shows the outstanding extent to which power was *multi-dimensional*, inherently based on negotiation, sharing, moves and counter-moves. However, my thesis also tries to go beyond the 'revisionist' opposition to the institutionalist view, which has limited itself to put into question the smallness and compactness of the said elites, without changing the substance of the problem—that is, without questioning *who* actually held shares of power and *how* power was exercised in practice. To the contrary, the perspective I have proposed could be defined as 'post-revisionist' (or 'integrationist') insofar as it invites to consider not only the political agency of the elites, but also that of multiple social spheres.⁹ Chapter 7, based on the study of documentary interaction between authorities and subjects as seen from the latter's perspective, constitutes the clearest example of my argument—for example when, as anticipated above, I highlight the way in which subjects of every rank were able to substantially influence the policies of the central authorities through petitions. But the entire thesis, with its systematic de-construction of political structures, official hierarchies, formal rules, and the material monumentality of documents, points in the same direction. My analysis of the social practices that physically opened the chancery to a wide range of outsiders (Chapter 3), for instance, demonstrates the desirability of a (so far under-explored) social-historical approach to political-administrative processes of decision-making.

There are, of course, other instances of post-revisionist political-institutional

⁹ For a discussion on classic institutionalist political historiography, see Burke 2005, 76-79, and Blanco 2008. For the opposition between classic institutionalist political historiography and revisionism, see De Vivo 2012, 357-358. For a wider discussion on revisionist historiography dealing with a number of early modern European case studies, see Benigno 1999, 3-59.

histories that explicitly consider power as an essentially dialogic, collaborative entity. However, they are still a minority.¹⁰ I hope that my micro-cultural-history of bureaucracy has made a convincing contribution to this way of interpreting pre-modern political culture. I regard it as convincing for two major reasons. Firstly, because it has taken as object of study a chancery—that is, the institution that for today's scholars still represents the *stronghold* of the above-mentioned one-dimensional character of power. Secondly, because it has focused on the materiality of documents—that is, the *embodiment* of the above-mentioned one-dimensional character of power—as a means to support its 'integrationist' stances. Ultimately, I hope to have corroborated the initial research hypothesis of this thesis: investigating (i) the processes happening behind and around chancery documents, and (ii) the traces these processes left on the documents' material body *does* unfold novel perspectives on political and institutional history.

¹⁰ Early examples are Najemy 1991 (Republic of Florence) and Grendi 1993 (Republic of Genoa). More recent works are Hindle 2000 (early modern England), and Beik 2005 (Louis XIV's France). Studies focusing on the spatial dynamics of cities like Rome and London also tend to highlight the mix of different social spheres: Nussdorfer 1997) and Harkness and Howard 2008.

Appendix 1 – Documents

(the parts in italics are those cited and translated in the thesis's text)

Document n. 1

(ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 132, 1524 June 6)

Commissario Taxarum Novarie

Ancora che ragionevolmente dovessimo permettere / che quelli che non hanno notificato lo oro, argento / et robe de Francesi, et altri nostri Inimici, nel / termino et secundo la dispositione de le / cride sopra cio facte in quella Cita fussero / puniti, Niente di meno, volendo noi piu / placitamente si aga, ve dicemo che siamo / contenti che cum nova grida prorogiate altri / tre giorni seguenti a ditte Cride ad manifestare / et exequire quanto in epse prime se contene. / Et allora volemo, et vi commettemo che / procedate contra quelli saranno Inobedienti senza ulla remissione / et rispetto ad la executione / de le pene contente in ditte Cride, che cossi / e mente nostra. Mediolani, 6 Iunii 1524.

Document n. 2

(ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 162, 1524 September 21)

Praetori Bassignane

Siamo advisati da Messer Gioanne de Cani nostro / Commissario ultra Po contra Rebelli, che non / vogli admettere le sue cride, ne fare cosa / che se ricerca in questa Impresa, como se ibi / non se tractasse del interesse nostro, cosa che / molto ni spiace, perho Ti dicemo sotto pena / de nostra disgratia, che debbi non solo admettere / le cride et darli li Processi et Indicii haverai / per qualuncha via contra dicti Rebelli o / suspecti, etiam che fussero de Bassignana, / ma circa ciò fare quanto sarai ricerchato da dicto / nostro Commissario, nel che manchando, ne faremo / tale demonstratione, che ni serai malcontento. Pizleonis, XXI septembris 1524.

Document n. 3

(ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 121-122, 1524 May 24)

Communi et hominibus Canobii

Siamo remasti molto admirati che ce habbiati mandato / homini tanto obdurati ad venire

*ad compositione / de subvenirne in questi nostri urgenti bisogni, sapendo / pure che
volemo restituire li dinari et havemo al / fine voluto che la bonta et clementia nostra
habbia / comportato la loro obstinatione, che unde speravamo / havere di voy adiutto al
meno de 1000 Ducati, se siamo / acomodati in 500, quali haveti ad pagare in la nostra /
Thesoreria generale per mano del nobile Gabriel Modono / Potesta nostro in quella Terra,
o de chi ve parira./ Qui haveti le vostre quietanze et dipò [sic] vi saranno / fatte le
assignatione come alli altri, di modo che / indubitamente rehareti li vostri dinari. La bona
/ nostra dispositione verso voy ni ha fatto essere / contenti di la prefata summa, et cossi
di bono / animo havemo acceptato il Iuramento de la / fidelita da epsi vostri nuncii a
nome vostro / con oppinione che se bene la necessita vi ha fatto / fare qualche
ostentatione in favore de nostri Inimici / et ribelli, non sarno pero mutati li animi vostri /
da la solita vostra fede et devotione verso noy, / in le quale vi exhortiamo ad perseverare
perche / ni trovareti bono et iusto principe verso voy. / Resta che vi exhibiati prompti al
pagamento de li / dicti 500 Ducati che si ne possiamo valere in alcuni / grandi bisogni al
Commune beneficio de tutto il Stato, / et che fciati come li altri subditi che ni hanno /
subvenuto, quali si sono valse de le migliori / borse per aiutarne in tempo, facendo poi
reimborsare / de quelli che se scodeno alla giornata de li / manco habili. Mediolani, 24
Maii 1524.*

Document n. 4

(ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 71-72, 1523 December 29)

Sfortino Sfortie et Ioanne Paulo Lonato seu eorum locumtenentibus

*Laltro heri di commissione nostra el Magnifico nostro suppremo / Cancellario vi scripse
non dovestovi molestare el / loco di Basgape, per essere Tanto vicino ad Melegnano /
dovi sono nostri Inimici, che facilmente presentendo [sic] la / contributione loro, gli
haveriano possuto inferire / qualche molestia de focco o sacco et molte / Cause alhora
scriptevi per esso. Al presente havendo / inteso che non haveti voluto non solo obedire / a
dicte lettere, ma havete retenuti li messi che ve / le portavano, ne habiamo preso
grandissimo dispiacere, / et pero vi Commettemo che subito alla havuta / de le presente
vogliate fare relassare li dui messi / predicti per vui retenuti, et non molestarli, ne /
lassareti molestare da altri el prefato loco de / Basgape per cuncto de contributione,
perche cossi / e la volunta nostra, alla [quale] guardarete de non contravenire. Mediolani,
29 Decembris 1523.*

Document n. 5

(ASMi, *Registri Ducali*, 141, l. 18, 1527 September 28)

Canonicis et Capitulo ecclesiae Sancti / Stephani de Rosate

Alli giorni passati, essendo vacata la Prepositura di / quella vostra Ghiesa, et desiderando summa- / mente che fosse pervenuta nel Venerabile / Giovanni Antonio Rozono nepote del Egregio / Domino Bartholomeo Rozono secrettario nostro / Dilettissimo, vi scrivessimo in exhortatione perche / lo elegesti al ditto loco; ma ritrovandosi / ad quel tempo quella nostra Terra in potere / de nemici, non solamente non presumesti de / fare tale electione, ma neanche di accettare / le nostre litere per timore d'epsi Inimici, / cum promessa pero che quando essa / Terra fosse stata in faculta nostra che non / haresti mancati de compiacerni et per / tanto essendosi hora recuperata ditta Terra / et havendo inteso con non mediocre dispiacere / che haveti fatto altra electione, ce e parso / con le presente exhortarvi ad revocare ditta / electione con protesta che quanto haveti / fatto se intenda essere nullo et di novo / non obstante ditta electione ad gratificatione / nostra essere contenti di elegere con unanimo / consenso et servate le debite solemnitae / el predicto Giovanni Antonio alla Propositura sopradetta, / Inducendolo al Possesso de tal beneficio et / mantenendolo in quello con la perceptione / de frutti et proventi debiti et soliti, perche / oltra sara bene provisto alla Cura de / ditta Giesia ad noi fareti tal piacere / che acchaschandone occasione ve ne / saremo grati. Datae Laudae XXVIII Septembris MDXXVII.

Document n. 6

(ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 225, ll. 10-11, 1531 June 5)

Ioanne Ambrosio Morigiae Iudicii Stratarum Mediolani

Per il Vicario Duodeci de provisione / et Iudice de le Strate havemo inteso / che tutte le stratte mastre sono molto / desordinate, el che procede si perche gli / sono alchune Fagie che non hanno patrono, / si etiam per che li sono multi che allegano / non son tenuti à tali charichi per vigore / de suoi privilegii a lor concessi per noi / et predecessori nostri; inherendo alle lettere / sopra cio scritte per nostri Antecessori Te / dicemo et significamo che la mente nostra / e che, attesa la qualita de tempi, niuna / persona de quale grado voglia si sia / sii preservata exempta per vigore de / qualunque lettere et privilegio a lor

heri / retro concesse de aptatione de strate, / ponti, atzini, et evacuatione de fossi, / et altre cose dependente de strate, / ne tu admitterai diffensione alchuna / per vigore de tale exemptione. / Imo procederai contra li delinquenti / secondo li ordini et statuti della nostra / Inclita citta de Milano, per che al beneficio / et comodo Comune è conveniente che / chadeuno li contribuisca remosta [sic] / ogni Immunitate, et cosi volemo / sii exequita senza perho preiuditio / nel resto de dicta Immunitate et / privilegio. Mediolani V Iunii MDXXXI.

Document n. 7

(ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 221, l. 234, 1525 July 9)

Referendario Cremone

Ignari de li ordini de mercadanti di questa / Cita concedessimo alli di passati alcune / lettere ad Alcuni mercadanti milanesi di / potere condurre fuori depsa fustanei; doppoy, / essendoni significato Tale cosa essere contra / la forma de dicti ordini, volemo siano osservati / le presente lettere nostre in contrario, non obstante le / quale credemo fossero concesse per importu- / nitate de supplicanti, et cum loro malitia. Datae Mediolani, die VIII Julii 1525.

Document n. 8

(ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, l. 119, 1523 January 15)

Ioanni Iacobo de Busti

Havendone facto intendere el nobile Cesare Pelizono nostro / Referendario di Pavia che per li antecessori sui / sempre e stato solito exigere tutte le mulcte et / condemnatione de dicta Cita et contado spectante / alla Camera nostra, et hora che tu sotto umbra de / nostre lettere gli usurpi quello ufficio, Instandone / ad volerlo reintegrare secundo el suo consueto / et de sui predecessori, Nui considerata la / domanda sua honestissima, per le presenti nostre Te / dicemo et commettimo che da qui in ante non / presumi intrometterti in exigere dicte mulcte et / condemnatione, ma lassi la Cura ad epso nostro / Referendario, et questo nonostante alcune lettere ti / havessimo concesso, le quale per le presente revocamo / et annullamo, Remettendo in mano depso / Referendario il Quinterneto de le multe et condem- / natione quale haverai presso di te, ad cio / non essendo exacte le possa exigere et renderne / conto ali agenti de la Camera nostra. Et in

ciò non / mancarai perché cossi e nostra mente. Mediolani, die XV Januarii 1523.

Document n. 9

(ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, l. 44, 1522 November 1)

Magistratis extraordinariis

Intendemo che in Monte Brianza, plebe de / Incino et parte circostante, sono molti / nostri ribelli i quali sotto pretesto de diversi / salvi conducti ardiscano dimorare nel / stato nostro e anche goldino il suo, como se / fossero cosi stati a nostri servitii, como sono / stati a quelli de Inimici. Pero volendo / provvedere che non vadino impuniti de loro / errori, vi dicemo debiate ben investigare / quali sono questi tali, et mandare in nome / de la Camera nostra ad apprehendere tutti li / loro beni, non obtante salvi conducti quali / habiano da qualunche persone salvo da noi / proprii, et sottoscritti da nui proprii, mandando / li nomi de Tutti loro alli dilecti nostri deputati / de rebelli, acio possano procedere contra le / persone loro secondo rechede la Iustitia. Et in cio non mancharete. Viglevani, Kalendas novembris 1522.

Document n. 10

(ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, l. 1, 1522 September 18)

Dominis Magistratis extraordinariis

Per fare provisione al desordine et detrimento qual segue / alle cose nostre per colpa de li notari di quello nostro / Magistrato gli scrivemo le alligate, quale volemo se / legano in vostra presentia, comettendovi che sotto pena / de la privatione de vostri officii vogliate provvedere / che in termino de quattro giorni li dicti notari diano / alli Dilecti nostri Rasonati de la Camera extraordinaria, / et anche alli nostri Referendarii generali, la nota auctentica / de tutte le descriptione, apprehensione de beni, et condemnatione / quale se ritrovano presso di loro, et quale accadera farsi / in lo advenire, ad cio per esse si possano fare fare le / debite executione contra li debitori, et acconziare / le scripture opportune. Papie, XVIII Septembris 1522.

Document n. 11

(ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, ll. 1-2, 1522 September 18)

Notariis Magistratus extraordinari

Siamo advisati da li Dilecti nostri Referendarii generali che / trovano grandissima difficultate in scodere li fructi et / ficti de li beni de rebeli spectanti alla Camera nostra / per che le scripture non sono in sue mane, libri de li / rasonati de la Camera, il che dicono procedere perche / voy non voleti darli la notta de le descriptione et / apprensione depsi beni, come e il debito vostro, la quale / cosa cognoscendo quanto danno ni porti ni e stata / molestissima, et se siamo molto maravigliati che tegniate / si pocho cuncto del bursino nostro como seti obligati / per il locho vi habbiamo dato. Pero vi comandiamo / sotto pena de la privatione de vostri officii, et de / cinquecento ducati d'oro da essere applicati alla camera / nostra per ciascuno de voi ogni voota, che contrafareti / a questa nostra voluntate, che in termino de quattro / giorni debbiate dare nota auctentica alli predicti nostri / Rasonati de la Camera extraordinaria de tutte / le descriptione, apprehensione de beni, et condemnatione / quale vi trovate presso di voi facte da qui indreto, / et il medesimo volemo faciate de tutte le condem- / natione, apprehensione, et descriptione quale accadera / farsi per lo advenire, notificandole a dicti Rasonati / nel ditto termino dopo ni haverete notitia, et ancho dandone copia autentica dil tutto ad epsi Referendarii / se la vorano ad ogni loro richesta. Papie XVIII Septembris MDXXII.

Document n. 12

(ASMi, *Registri delle Missive*, 220, ll. 267-268, 1523 April 30)

Pretori Papie

Novamente essendone stato referto che alcuni / sotto pretexto de nostre Commissione, andavano / per le Terre et loci dil Dominio nostro ad / depingere le arme nostre Ducale, in grave danno / de subditi nostri; et sapendo che non haveamo / concesse tale lettere; per provvedere ad tali incon- / venienti, deputassimo il nobile Angelino de / li Conti de Gambarana, quale havesse andare / ad inquirere tale fraude, & Trovando alcuno / delinquente li facesse destenere, et poi ne dasese [sic] / aviso. Hora in exequitione de nostre Commissione, / havendo il predicto Angelino ritrovato uno certo / Maestro Baptista da Marliano depintore, quale cum / lettere falsificate andava depingendo dicte arme, / et facto lo consignare in le forze vostre, volendo / provvedere ad tale eccesso, ve indirizamo / qui incluse le dicte lettere, Commettendovi che / cum ogni diligentia debbiate esaminare el predicto / Maestro Baptista et cercare de sapere lauctore / et complici de la falsificatione de ditte lettere / et sigillo, et servato il debito modo de / ragione, et formato

*el processo contra epso / ne farete quello ne vorra la iustitia, et / Trovando che el
predicto Maestrro Baptista de ragione / per dicta causa meriti la morte, gli farete / in
lultimo supplicio suo, apendere epse lettere / al Collo, a cio che a tutti li altri Trisa passi /
in exemplo, et avanti veniati ad effetto prima / del tutto ne darete aviso ad noi, o al nostro
/ suppremo Cancellario. Mediolani, ultimo aprilis 1523. / Fate quello vole Iustitia et
presto.*

Appendix 2 – Glossaries

Glossary 1 – Diplomatics

- Dispositio*** Dispositive clause: the most essential part of the text*, through which the author of a letter patent formalises his/her will and establishes (or acknowledges) a juridical act, determines its nature, contents, and modes. (*VID*, 57)
- Eschatocol** The final part of a letter patent's text*. It always bears the *corroboratio*, the date, the ducal seal, and the secretarial signature(s); and it possibly bears the ducal signature, notes of registration, and the *plica*. (*VID*, 54)
- External features** The formal elements of the document that can be studied only on the original document, or on its exact reproduction (writing material, handwriting, decoration.) (*VID*, 45)
- Internal features** The formal elements of the document that have to do with its text* (language, style, formulae.) (*VID*, 51)
- Intitulatio*** Intitulation: the element of the protocol* specifying the name of the author of the letter patent and his/her titles. (*VID*, 54)
- Jussio*** The order — written or oral — of creating a letter patent. (*VID*, 86)
- Plica*** Turn up: the reinforcement of the bottom part of the letter patent, obtained by folding the parchment. The *plica* is typically made to tie a pendant seal.
- Protocol** The initial part of a letter patent's text*. It bears the *intitulatio**, and possibly the *salutatio**. (*VID*, 54)
- Tenor*** The ensemble of protocol*, text* and eschatocol*. (*VID*, 53)
- Text** The part of the *tenor** directly relating to the juridical act. It contains the causes that brought to the establishment of the juridical act, the *dispositio**, and the clauses intended to precise the contents of the juridical act and to ensure its observation. (*VID*, 53)
- Salutatio*** Greeting: The element of the protocol* through which the author of the letter patent greets its recipient. (*VID*, 56)

Glossary 2 – Sforza Administration

- Camera*** The financial hub of Sforza administration.

- Commissario*** Sforza *Commissari* ('Commissaries') were officers in charge of specific matters, usually (but not always) appointed in exceptional/emergency situations.
The *Commissari* appearing in this dissertation are the *Commissari del Sale* ('Commissaries of the Salt'), a *Commissario delle Tasse* ('Tax Commissary'), a *Commissario contra Rebelli* ('Commissary against the Rebels') and a generic *Commissario* for the town of Novara.
- Governatore*** The Sforza officer in charge of military affairs in a peripheral town (and/or area) of the duchy.
- Podestà / Pretore*** The Sforza officer in charge of judicial affairs in a peripheral town (and/or area) of the duchy.
- Rasonati de la Camera*** Accountants working at the *Camera*.
- Referendario*** The Sforza officer in charge of financial affairs in a peripheral town (and/or area) of the duchy. The *Referendari Generali* are the central officers coordinating the activity of the *Referendari*.

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Acknowledgements

This research has been made possible thanks to the funding and assistance of the ERC-sponsored project '*ARCHIVES* – A Comparative History of Archives in Late and Early Modern Italy,' led by Dr Filippo De Vivo.

I wish to thank Dr Filippo De Vivo and Professor Evelyn Welch, who supervised the making of this thesis, for their continuous support and endless patience.

I also wish to thank Alessandro Silvestri, Andrea Guidi, Fabio Antonini (members of the *ARCHIVES* project) and Anna Gialdini for sharing these intense years of research.

Further thanks go to my parents Ezio and Paola, who unconditionally supported my efforts—especially when it really mattered; and to Pilar, my beloved dog, who always faithfully waited for my return any time I suddenly disappeared to move to London.

When I finished my MA in Milan in 2011, I wrote that I would have probably been able to complete my thesis without the love of Greta; however, such experience would have nonetheless been much less amazing. I now have to rephrase this statement in a very simple way: without Greta, nothing of this would have ever been possible.

Peculiar as it may seem, I also need to thank a number of London landmarks in whose shadow I spent some of the most exciting months of my life: the Grand Union/Regent's Canal, the Trelick Tower, the Barbican Centre, the British Library, the Warburg Institute, and the Senate House.

Finally, I would like to give my sincere thanks to the *Society for Renaissance Studies* and the *Royal Historical Society* for providing further funding for my research.

21 April 2016

Post scriptum, 20 July 2016: I wish to thank my examiners Mary Laven and Guido Rebecchini, who took the time to read this dissertation and to discuss it with me in an immensely helpful viva.

