



«Bon fiol di questo stado» Borso d'Este, Venice, and pope Paul II: explaining success in Renaissance Italian politics

Richard M. Tristano

Abstract:

Despite Giuseppe Pardi's judgment that Borso d'Este lacked the ability to connect single parts of statecraft into a stable foundation, this study suggests that Borso conducted a coherent and successful foreign policy of peace, heightened prestige, and greater freedom to dispose. As a result, he was an active participant in the Quattrocento state system (*Grande Politico Quadro*) solidified by the Peace of Lodi (1454), and one of the most successful rulers of a smaller principality among stronger competitive states. He conducted his foreign policy based on four foundational principles. The first was stability. Borso anchored his statecraft by aligning Ferrara with Venice and the papacy. The second was display or the politics of splendor. The third was development of stored knowledge, based on the reputation and antiquity of Estense rule, both worldly and religious. The fourth was the politics of personality, based on Borso's affability, popularity, and other virtues. The culmination of Borso's successful statecraft was his investiture as Duke of Ferrara by Pope Paul II. His success contrasted with the disaster of the War of Ferrara, when Ercole I abandoned Borso's formula for rule. Ultimately, the memory of Borso's successful reputation was preserved for more than a century.

Borso d'Este; Ferrara; Foreign policy; Venice; Pope Paul II

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**«BON FIOLE DI QUESTO STADO» BORSO D'ESTE, VENICE,
AND POPE PAUL II: EXPLAINING SUCCESS IN
RENAISSANCE ITALIAN POLITICS¹**

RICHARD M. TRISTANO

I.

«Borso per la sua fede e il suo amore alla repubblica»

In his *Historiae suorum temporum*, Sigismondo dei Conti da Foligno offered a comparison between Borso and Ercole d'Este, where he made three crucial observations.² (See n.1) The first is the deep Venetian presence in the Polesine of Rovigo, territory possessed by the marquises of Este but which was formerly controlled by Venice.

¹ Many thanks to Lauren Leighton, M.L.I.S., Saint Mary's University of Minnesota. Without her assistance this article would not have been possible.

² SIGISMONDO DEI CONTI DA FOLIGNO, *Le storie de' suoi tempi*, Rome G. Barbera 1883, p. 116. «Fino di quando regnava Borso, gli abitanti di Cavarzere aveano portate lagnanze in Senato, perché non fossero diminuiti i loro confini, e che fossero occupati dal popolo del Polesine. Il Senato non avea quelle lagnanze disprezzate: ma Borso co' suoi modi cortesi e l'ammirabile sua destrezza, nel suo pensiero di affezionarsi i Veneziani, cui ogni anno andava a complimentare all'impensata sulla stessa regina dell'Adria, ora col dire che avrebbe fatto quanto volea il Senato, ora pregando a meglio riflettere, tenne la cosa sempre nello stato suo primiero, fino a che ei venne a morte. Anche nei primi anni di Ercole, quando godeva la totale amicizia dei Veneziani, la cosa restò tranquilla; ma poscia disacerbati gli animi fu messa in campo di nuovo, e dicendo Ercole che si sarebbe attenuto alle leggi de' suoi antenati, e i Veneti rispondendo che a Borso per la sua fede e il suo amore alla repubblica aveano concesse molte cose, di cui essi lo credevano indegno, sorsero gravi contrasti e si volse pensiero alle armi.»

«Up to when Borso ruled, the inhabitants of Cavarzere had brought their complaints to the [Venetian] Senate, because [the Senate] would not reduce their borders that had been occupied by the people of the Polesine [as water receded]. The Senate did not look down on those complaints; Borso with his kind manners and admirable adroitness, and in his feelings of affection for the Venetians, went every year to pay his respects to the same queen of Adria, now saying that he would do whatever the Senate wanted, now asking to ponder the thing that he always considered first in importance in his state up to when he died. Also, in the first years of Ercole, when he enjoyed complete friendship with the Venetians, things remained tranquil; but afterwards minds were disturbed and new matters for discussion were created and Ercole said that he would adhere to the laws of his ancestors. The Venetians responded that they had conceded many things to Borso for his faith and his love of the Republic of which they believed Ercole unworthy, raising grave disagreement and turning thoughts to arms. »

Second, is the close relationship between Borso d'Este (1450-1471), ruler of Ferrara, and the Venetian republic. His most important state policy was good and submissive relations with Venice (the connection between «good» and «submissive» is key). Third, Conti identifies elements of Borso's personal style of rule, defined by his kindness and faithfulness, his adroitness, a skillful nimbleness that buttressed his love for the Republic and perhaps explained it. In return, the Venetian government conceded many things to Borso as reward for his faithful love. This contrasts with his half-brother and successor, Ercole, who adheres to the laws of his ancestors. Laws are inflexible and impersonal, he lacks Borso's adroitness and pleasing personality, his way of doing things, his style. By his ancestors, Conti connects Ercole to two centuries of tension between Ferrara and Venice. Eventually, these tensions, exacerbated by Ercole's abandonment of Borso's policy, his different disposition, his alliances with Venice's rivals, culminated in the War of Ferrara (1482-84) and the loss of the Polesine of Rovigo.

Conti's ability to distinguish between the nature and consequences of Borso's and Ercole's policies casts serious doubt on Giuseppe Pardi's century-old study of Borso, still the most authoritative. Pardi concluded that while Borso did not lack the ability to conduct negotiations (*condurre negoziati*), he hatched plots and wove intrigues and did so without sincerity. In the end, Pardi condemned Borso's foreign policy for its lack of elevated principles that promoted equilibrium and for its insincerity. Presumably, Pardi believed that other princes such as Filippo Maria Visconti and Sigismondo Malatesta were sincere and principled. According to Pardi Borso's greatest defect was that like an artist he was «. . . ingenious in drawing general plans, like an architect who knows how to draw single parts of a building well and to manage its construction with mastery, but not to connect them solidly on stable foundations».³

³ G. PARDI, *Borso d'Este duca di Ferrara, Modena e Reggio* in «Studi storici», XV fasc. 1 (1906), pp. 171-203; 241-288, especially 286-87, «. . . d'ingegno nel tracciare piani generali come un architetto che sappia ben disegnare le single parti di un edificio e dirigerne con maestria la costruzione, ma non collegarle solidamente su stabili fondamenta».

Lazzari is considerably more positive about Borso's foreign policy. «La sua tattica fu sempre la stessa: nascondere i maneggi e le macchinazioni sotto la maschera del principe bonario, gaudente e pacifista; girare con destrezza gli ostacoli, accarezzare e blandire i nemici per addormentare i loro sospetti; fomentare le ambizioni degli amici per spingerli nella lotta e schivare accortamente i pericoli in cui egli potesse incorrere, pronto sempre

Nor can Pardi's judgments be dismissed as merely old fashioned, for Luciano Chiappini's (2001) and Marco Folin's (1998) evaluations retain much of Pardi's language, a depiction of Borso's foreign policy as unintegrated maneuvers, underhanded intrigue, pretense, and especially the trope of hypocrisy. Borso's world is theater, hyperbole, a reign of twenty years without any results.⁴ Similarly, Polibio Zanetti's generalization of the moral and political decadence of Italian Renaissance state leaders has been one of the «most powerful and

a portare il ramo d'ulivo tra i contendenti e a predicare la concordia facendosi promotore di pace.»

«His tactics were always the same: to conceal the intrigues and the machinations under the mask of the good-natured, jovial, and peaceful prince, turning the obstacles with dexterity, caressing and cajoling his enemies to put their suspicions to rest; fomenting the ambitions of friends to push them into war and shrewdly avoiding the perils in which he might incur, always ready to hold out the olive branch among his adversaries and to preach concord by becoming a promoter of peace». A. LAZZARI, *Il primo duca di Ferrara, Borso d'Este*, «Deputazione di storia patria per L'Emilia e La Romagna. Sezione di Ferrara», III (1945), p.119.

4 L. CHIAPPINI, *Gli Estensi, mille anni di storia Ferrara*, 2001, p. 148 «L'attività politica di Borso fu sempre improntata all'intrigo più subdolo sotto le apparenze della benevolenza e dell'amicizia, alla finzione talvolta collimante con ipocrisia, all'intento di danneggiare l'avversario ma non esporre la propria persona ed il proprio Stato, alla ricerca del proprio tornaconto e del proprio utile in ogni tentativo di comporre o turbare la pace, senza giungere ad un inserimento dei singoli fattori e dei vari problem in un quadro politico d'assieme. » «Borso's political activity was always marked by the most underhanded intrigue under the guise of benevolence and friendship, the pretense sometimes aligning with hypocrisy, with the intention of damaging his opponent while not exposing his person and his state, in search of one's own personal advantage and profit in every attempt to put together or disturb the peace, without arriving at an insertion of individual factors and the various problems in an overall political framework. » Ibid., p. 162 «Questo è il mondo, o meglio il teatro di Borso: dietro le quinte stanno i sogni di una iperbolica grandezza, le instancabili manovre, le faticose relazioni diplomatiche con i più potenti . . . e le delusioni frequenti per i grami risultati di tanta ventennale fatica.» «This is the world, or rather the theater of Borso: behind the scenes are the dreams of hyperbolic grandeur, the tireless maneuvers, the strenuous diplomatic relations with the most powerful . . . and the frequent disappointments from the grim results of such a twenty-years effort. » The comments of Marco Folin can be added as well. When Borso offered himself as mediator in the Colleonic War, in which he had a primary role starting, Folin reaches back to some Pardonian language charging him unscrupulousness and hypocrisy (spregiudicatezza e ipocrisia). M. FOLIN, *Gli oratori estensi nel sistema politico italiano (1440-1505)*, in *Girolamo Savonarola tra Ferrara e l'Europa* (atti del Convegno di Ferrara, marzo-aprile 1998), eds. G. FRAGNITO and M. MIEGGE, Florence 2001, pp. 51-84, especially pp. 71-2.

enduring in Italian historiography.»⁵ He wrote, «...the politics followed especially in Italy during the fifteenth and a good part of the sixteenth centuries. The instability of alliances that the Italian princes made among themselves, their egoism and the bad faith, that constantly determined their actions, the plots and betrayals to which none of them hesitated to resort, in order to attain their true objective, were the first causes of all the wars and all the upheavals that brought very great damage to Italy, facilitating successive invasions and foreign conquest.»⁶

Certainly, there is abundant evidence of egoism, bad faith, betrayals, and instability. Sixtus IV perceived Ferdinand of Naples's rapprochement with Lorenzo de' Medici as one of those betrayals. But Italy was on the cusp of creating a more balanced if fragile state system that had the potential to restrain such behavior. The Estensi had seized control of Ferrara as early as 1240 and Modena in 1288, but they did not secure permanent command of their domain until 1409 when they absorbed Reggio Emilia. It was around this time that the "Great Political Framework" (*Grande Quadro Politico*) began to coalesce in the Quattrocento, dating from the end of the Great Schism in 1417 to the invasion of Charles VIII in 1494.⁷ The framework, a coherent system of autonomous territorial powers, fostered a new political stability in Italy. Its culmination was the Peace of Lodi (1454). Initially a treaty ending a half century of hostilities between Milan and Venice, within a year nearly every Italian state had joined to create the Italian League (*Lega Italica*), pledging to preserve and defend each state. Italy now had a juridical framework and a negotiating network to keep the peace. It did not keep a perfect one as there were wars in Tuscany, Ferrara, and Naples, nor did it avert new challenges, particularly of legitimation.

⁵ G. CHITTOLINI, *The "Private," the "Public," the State*, «The Journal of Modern History» LXVII (1995), pp. S34-S61, especially p. S36.

⁶ P. ZANETIL, review of E. PIVA, *La Guerra di Ferrara del 1482* in «Nuovo Archivio Veneto», IV (1892), p. 375. «... la politica seguita specialmente in Italia nel secolo decimo quinto ed in buona parte del decimo sesto. L'instabilità delle alleanze, che i principi italiani facevano tra loro, l'egoismo e la mala fede, che costantemente ne determinavano le azioni, le congiure ed i tradimenti, a cui nessuno di essi si peritava di ricorrere pur di raggiungere il proprio intento, furono la causa prima di tutte le guerre e di tutti i rivolgimenti, che, recando danni grandissimi all'Italia, facilitarono le successive invasioni e conquiste straniere.»

⁷ This is the term Lazzarini uses. I. LAZZARINI, *L'Italia degli Stati territoriali, Secoli XIII-XV*, Bari-Rome 2003, pp. 48-9.

Thus, Venice faced an aggressive, expansionist Ottoman Empire while it sought to regularize its *terraferma* possessions, the Aragonese needed to establish their authority in the southern Kingdom of Naples, the Sforza replaced the Visconti and sought to complete their control of Milan while fighting Venice, Cosimo de' Medici continued consolidating his control of the Florentine government, and the popes were acting less as universalizing sovereigns and more like the other territorial powers as they restored their temporal authority. The cardinalate was increasingly dominated by Italy's ruling families and elites.⁸

One of the best examples of the challenges and responses to these developments was Francesco Sforza. The emperor refused to legitimize him as duke of Milan, while his close relationship with Cosimo de' Medici (and his money) provided Milan with mutual de facto security. Similarly, Borso d'Este and Ferrara, wedged between the great powers, were like Sforza princes who had urgent needs for «mutual bonds between regimes, to supply by reciprocal acknowledgement a formal and public recognition of their hegemony and external role.»⁹ No topic connected to the Great Political Framework has received more attention than the establishment of resident ambassadors who had no more important duty than to gather information and communicate it to their government. Ferrara's resident ambassador in Rome, Giacomo Trotti, played an outsized role in Borso's strategy to obtain ducal status from the pope. As Riccardo Fubini put it, «the creation of an embassy became an attribute of sovereignty.»¹⁰

Among the major Italian states seeking security and legitimacy were a bevy of minor ones, the Estensi domain being among the most prominent. The Burckhardtian Renaissance is still detectable in Pardi and Zanetti, culturally brilliant but morally flawed, it short-circuited analysis of how the minor powers survived. Intrinsic to Conti's narrative was an understanding that Ferrara's relationship to Venice

⁸ S. FLETCHER, *Cardinals and the War of Ferrara*, «Royal Studies Journal» IV (2017), pp. 64-77 and C. FLETCHER, *Diplomacy in Renaissance Rome*, Cambridge 2015, p. 27.

⁹ I. LAZZARINI, *Renaissance Diplomacy* in I. LAZZARINI and A. GAMBERINI eds., *The Italian Renaissance State*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 425-443, especially, p. 428.

¹⁰ R. FUBINI, *Diplomacy and Government in the Italian City-States of the Fifteenth Century (Florence and Venice)*, in D. FRIGO, ed., A. BELTON, trans., *Politics and Diplomacy in Early Modern Italy: The Structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450-1800*. Cambridge 2000, pp. 25-48, especially p. 31.

was that of a «mouse to an elephant. » None were smaller than Piombino on the southern coast of Tuscany. Like Ferrara, Piombino had strategic value, control of the Tyrrhenian sea through the strait between Tuscany and Corsica.¹¹ This drew the interest of the great powers and threatened to trap the smaller entities in regional conflicts exposing them to grave dangers but few benefits. To survive, the lesser powers had to be particularly adept at maneuvering, for they needed to find a powerful protector amidst a dynamic political calculus. This was especially true for papal vicars like Borso and Federico da Montefeltro, for the papacy as an elective monarchy of old men was particularly prone to radical changes in policy.¹² Lacking the ability to project power on the scale of the major powers, the smaller ones emphasized informal relationships of influence and authority, and a more pactist and reciprocal approach to foreign (and domestic) policy.¹³

While the Estensi seized control of Ferrara by 1240 it was not until 1329 that Pope John XXII named them apostolic vicars. This new legal status coincided with the reign of Obizzo III (1317-1352) who fathered ten illegitimate children with his mistress Lippa Ariosti. It was Obizzo who created a system of serial lordships among brothers, his legitimized sons, and obtained the blessing of it from Pope Clement VI in 1352.¹⁴ Pius II (1458-1464) included in his *Commentaries* a mini history of Ferrara with its peculiar Estense tradition of rule by bastards. «Here is an extraordinary fact about the family: within recent memory no legitimate son has ever inherited the title. . . It is a circumstance contrary not only to Christian teaching but to the law of almost every

¹¹ The metaphor is Abulafias'. D. ABULAFIA, *The Mouse and the Elephant: Relations between the Kings of Naples and the Lordship of Piombino in the Fifteenth Century*, in J. LAW & B. PATON eds., *Communes and Despots in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, Farnham 2010, pp. 145-160 and D. ABULAFIA, *Piombino between the Great Powers in the Late Fifteenth Century*, in P. GUGLIEMOTTI, I. LAZZARINI & G. M. VARANINI eds., *Europa e Italia: Studi in onore di Giorgio Chittolini*, Florence 2011, pp. 3-13.

¹² C. CLOUGH, *Federico da Montefeltro and the Kings of Naples: A Study in Fifteenth-Century Survival*, «Renaissance Studies» VI (1992), pp. 113-172, especially pp. 116-120.

¹³ I. LAZZARINI and A. GAMBERINI, *The Italian Renaissance State...*, cit. p. 4. The Estensi state which was divided by three distinct cities, Ferrara, Modena, and Reggio and a collection of smaller units, was particularly heterogeneous. See M. FOLIN, *Rinascimento Estense, politica, cultura, istituzioni di un antico Stato italiano* 2nd ed., Rome-Bari 2004, pp. 50-120.

¹⁴ J. FAIR BESTOR, *Bastardy and Legitimacy in the Formation of a Regional State in Italy: The Estense Succession*, «Comparative Studies in Society and History» XXXVIII (1996), pp. 545-589, on the vicariate, p. 561; on the serial lordship, p. 566.

nation.»¹⁵ Niccolò III (1393-1441) tried to alter the system somewhat for one based on primogeniture, naming Leonello, his eldest surviving son as heir and his legitimate sons as his successors. But so strong was the principle of brotherly succession and so broad the political support of Borso, that he was able to succeed his brother rather than Leonello's son Niccolò and did so without violence. The Estensi had successfully maintained this sophisticated system of serial lordship and family solidarity for a century and Borso had every interest to preserve it as the second-born illegitimate son, who had been left out of his father's will. The Obizzian system required a high degree of self-understanding, notable restraint, and considerable family solidarity that could withstand the vicissitudes of domestic politics. The best evidence for this was Borso's ability to balance the rival claims of his brother Ercole and his nephew Niccolò di Leonello for more than twenty years.

In sum, Borso was just as capable of maintaining a complex foreign policy as he was the domestic Obizzian one, for both required those mutual bonds to work and both were sustained in the name of peace, prosperity, and stability. Borso's success and that of his dynasty, sustained for more than three hundred and fifty years, was based on no mere ego and theatrical artifice but on the strategies that created and maintained the very stable foundations that Pardi did not recognize. Moreover, Borso's foreign policy reflected a heightened awareness of the increased vulnerability of his middling state amidst the more powerful ones that had coalesced in the Quattrocento's Great Political Framework. Within the Estense family tradition, Borso pursued protection and legitimation through papal sovereignty culminating in his installation as duke of Ferrara in 1471. Borso's investiture of his imperial fiefs as duke of Modena and Reggio was more the product of Emperor Frederick III's fortuitous visit to Rome to collect his bride and some cold, hard cash. But Borso's relations with Venice and the pope were the product of consistent goals and calculated policy practiced over two decades.

If the fundamentals of Borso's foreign policy were thoroughly examined, his intimate subservience to Venice and his fidelity to the pope, what sort of foundational principles would be revealed? How do

¹⁵ PIUS II, *Commentaries*, M. MESERVE and M. SIMONETA, eds. Cambridge 2003, book 2, chap. 39, pp. 359-61.

these principles and style of rule explain his success? The successes of his policies can be tentatively defined as keeping Ferrara out of war by managing relationships with more powerful states, achieving ducal status that enhanced his legitimacy and prestige, and acting as a relevant participant in Italian politics despite the modest resources at his disposal. These successes become even more notable considering the War of Ferrara, a great disaster for Ferrara and the most conspicuous failure of the Peace of Lodi. What would we learn about Quattrocento politics by comparing Borso's Venetian policy with that of Ercole's before the War of Ferrara?

II. Ercole d'Este and the War of Ferrara

«[E] poco dopo Leonora figliuola di Ferdinando di Aragona re
di Napoli prese per moglie, la quale, come si disse, è stata
cagione di principiar questa Guerra.»

The causes of the War of Ferrara were multiple, complex, and of long duration, going back nearly 250 years (indeed, wars had broken out previously in 1308 and 1405).¹⁶ What were the grave disagreements between Ercole and Venice that Conti intimates led to war? Venice had long seen Ferrara as a potential rival and pressured her to sign a series of discriminating pacts (*patti*). Situated on the Po river, not too distant from the sea, Ferrara had the potential to challenge Venetian domination of the Adriatic. One of the first of these agreements was in 1240, the year that Azzo VII Novello took control of the city. It was a trade-off: the Estensi got Venetian support to oust their rivals, the Torelli, while Venice received certain privileges. Over time the privileges included the prohibition to receive merchants and merchandise from the Adriatic. Venetians were exempt from Ferrarese tolls and gabelles and had privileged access to Ferrarese food production. By the mid fifteenth century there was considerable

¹⁶ M. MALLETT, *Venice and the War of Ferrara, 1482-84*, in *War, Culture, and Society in Renaissance Venice: Essays in Honour of John Hale*, eds. D. CHAMBERS, C. CLOUGH, and M. MALLETT London 1993, pp. 57-72. Id., *Diplomacy and War in Later Fifteenth Century Italy* in «Proceedings of the British Academy», LXVII (1981), pp. 267-288. Id., *Reflections on Florence and Venice on the Eve of the War of Ferrara* in *Renaissance Studies in Honour of Craig Hugh Smyth*, Florence 1985, pp.149-153.

dispute about the exact extent of these privileges.¹⁷ Ferrara was forbidden to use the salt flats at Comacchio, to preserve a Venetian monopoly. The office of *visdomino*, staffed by Venetian patricians, was established to oversee enforcement of the treaties. The Venetian officials were unpopular and occasionally threatened. Despite Venice's best efforts, Ferrarese passive aggression consistently challenged Venetian hegemony. Smuggling was a constant irritant.

A second cause was the Polesine of Rovigo. Seized by Ferrara in a conflict with the Carraresi, it was ceded to Venice in 1393 for a loan of 50,000 ducats. Venice restored it to Ferrara in 1438 in gratitude for Estensi neutrality, but not before there had been considerable penetration of the territory by Venetian landowners. A good part of the Venetian elite saw the Polesine as rightly Venetian. This was the longest and most vulnerable border between Ferrara and Venice and as Conti indicated it received constant, special attention from Borso.

The third source of conflict between Ferrara and Venice was in Romagna, one of the most unstable parts of Italy.¹⁸ Technically part of the Papal States, it had long been occupied by a series of minor lordships, including the Ordellaffi (Forlì, 1302; Cesena, 1333), the Malatesta (Rimini, 1295; Pesaro, 1285) and the Manfredi (Faenza, 1313). By 1440 Venice had established its presence in Romagna when it occupied Ravenna, effectively cutting off Ferrara from the Adriatic. In the same year Niccolò III took possession of Bagnacavallo as the Estensi too moved into the vicinity. With its relatively small and dubious legal lordships, Romagna was the most fertile place for popes to seek possessions for their nephews. So, between the well-established lords, the popes, the Estensi, and Venice, Romagna was a major source of contention and violence, even more so with the introduction of the Sforza who received Pesaro from the pope in 1444.

The more immediate cause of the war can be traced back to the Pazzi War (1478-1480). Pope Sixtus IV and Ferdinand I of Naples had

¹⁷ T. DEAN, *Venetian Economic Hegemony: The Case of Ferrara 1200-1500*, «Studi Veneziani», XII (1986), pp. 45-98.

¹⁸ Rubinstein makes the point that in ca. 1509 and the League of Cognac against Venice, was triggered by Venetian penetration into the Romagna. Given its occupation of Ravenna in 1440 and meddling nearby, it could be argued that concern over Venetian expansion dates from around that time. N. RUBINSTEIN, *Italian Reactions to Terraferma Expansion in the Fifteenth Century in Renaissance Venice* ed. J.H. HALE, London 1973, pp. 197-217, especially p. 197.

supported the Pazzi plan to assassinate Lorenzo de' Medici and his brother. They were opposed by the northern alliance of Florence, Milan, and Venice. Ercole d'Este was appointed captain-general of its army. After nearly two years neither side prevailed while opposition grew in Florence because of the war's great cost. This led to Lorenzo's famous secret mission to Naples to peel Ferdinand away from the pope. His success created a Florence, Milan, Naples alliance which isolated Sixtus and Venice. Shortly thereafter, Ercole became Captain-General of the alliance army with a stipend of 50,000 ducats in peace, 80,000 in war.¹⁹ Venice and Sixtus became allies. Meanwhile, as Conti intimated, Ercole created a style of rule considerably different from Borso's who never married and whose popularity and affability were well known.²⁰ Ercole was less content to embrace the image of a loyal son to a fatherly Venice. He arranged a series of dynastic alliances.²¹ He married Eleonora d'Aragona, natural daughter of King Ferdinand of Naples (1473). Sanudo identified this as the main cause of the war, «... a little while later [Ercole] took for his wife Leonora, daughter of Ferdinand of Aragon, King of Naples, and she they say was the reason for the start of this war.»²² As soon as a male heir was born, Ercole betrothed Alfonso d'Este to Anna Sforza on 20 May 1477. Three years later on 28 May 1480 he betrothed Isabella d'Este to Francesco Gonzaga, the heir to the marquisate of Mantua, a traditional alliance. Beatrice d'Este was betrothed to Ludovico il Moro Sforza in June 1480. Step by step Ercole repositioned Ferrara away from Venice which responded in kind with the increased hostility Conti mentioned, especially among younger

¹⁹ On the Pazzi conspiracy and war see L. MARTINES, *April Blood, Florence and the Plot Against the Medici*, New York 2003. On Ercole as Captain-General see E. GARDINER, *Dukes and Poets in Ferrara*, New York 1904, rist. New York 1968, p. 162, Gardiner cites Zaccaria Barbaro's letter of 3 June 1480 to Giovanni Bentivoglio.

²⁰ On differences of style of rule see W. GUNDERSHEIMER, *Ferrara, the Style of a Renaissance Despotism*, Princeton 1973, pp. 213-14.

²¹ G. COZZI and M. KNAPTON, *Storia della repubblica di Venezia*, Turin 1986, pp. 65-6; T. DEAN, *Ferrara and Mantua*, in I. LAZZARINI and A. GAMBERINI, *The Italian Renaissance State... cit.*, p. 123.

²² M. SANUDO, *Commentarii della guerra di Ferrara tra li Viniziani ed il duca Ercole d'Este nel MCCCCXXXII*, Venice Picotti 1829, p. 5, «... poco dopo Leonora figliuola di Ferdinando di Aragona re di Napoli prese per moglie, la quale, come si disse, è stata cagione di principiar questa Guerra.» Cirneo makes the same claim, P. CYNÆUS, *Commentarius de bello ferrariensi, ab anno 1482 ad annum 1484*, in ed. L. A. MURATORI, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, Milan Ex typographia Societatis Palatinae 1723, vol. XXI, col. 1193.

members of the patriciate.²³ With longstanding irritants and more recent provocations, all that was needed was a trigger and that came in the form of a bitter dispute with the *visdomino* Gianvettore Contarini. He had condemned a Ferrarese merchant for selling contraband salt, which the Venetian government determined was in violation of the pacts. A few months later he arrested a priest and when the bishop's vicar sent a messenger to demand his release, claiming immunity from a secular court, Contarini punched him in the face. The vicar then excommunicated the *visdomino* leading to more mutual accusations.²⁴ In the meantime, after many years of war, peace with the Ottoman Empire (26 February 1480) freed Venice to go to war in Italy.

Not surprisingly, Venetian depictions of Ercole were deeply negative during the war. Within a carefully constructed narrative of dependent friendship, Marin Sanudo painted a picture of Estensi marquises who continuously violated the law established by the *patti* and overseen by the *visdomini*.²⁵ This was the legacy of Ercole's ancestors to which Conti referred. As Borso lay dying in 1471, the contest to succeed him divided the ruling class between supporters of Ercole and Niccolò di Leonello. Venice had supported Ercole while Milan and Mantua had backed his rival. The Venetians had supplied Ercole with money and threatened armed intervention to preserve Borso's policy.²⁶ Venice expected gratitude, instead step by step Ercole formed alliances with Venice's enemies. This betrayal stimulated harsh wartime propaganda in the form of satirical epigrams. One of these denounced Ercole for breaking the «sacred bonds of peace» between Venice and Ferrara, thus rendering him a sinner in violation of the ties promoted by Borso and destined for defeat.²⁷

²³ SIGISMONDO DEI CONTI, *Le storie...* cit., p. 120.

²⁴ E. PIVA, *La guerra di Ferrara del 1482, periodo primo*, Padua Draghi 1893, pp. 19-21.

²⁵ M. SANUDO, *Commentarii della guerra di Ferrara...* cit., p. 3.

²⁶ G. ANTONIOLI, 'Bone parole, ma niuna provisione'. *Politica e diplomazia nelle vicende della successione di Ercole I d'Este a Borso (1471)*, «I quaderni del Mediae Ætatis Sodalitium», XVI (2018), pp. 245-279, especially p. 257.

²⁷ S. TROVATO, *Epigrammi satirici veneziani contro Ercole I d'Este (da un Codice Marciano)*, in *Humanistica Marciana. Saggi offerti a Marin Zorzi*, eds. S. PELUSI and A. SCARSELLA, Milan 2008, pp. 67-78, especially p. 71. «durissimo principe generato dalla casa d'Este,/Hai rotto i sacri vincoli della pace concessa,/Perciò sei vinto poiché gli obblighi violati esigono». «O harsh prince generated by the house of the Este,/You have broken the sacred bonds of peace granted,/Therefore, you have been defeated because you violated the expected obligations». Also M. MALLETT, *Reflections on Florence and Venice...*, cit. p. 148.

Memories were long and as late as 1497, thirteen years after the peace treaty was signed, Ercole's loyalty was still suspect. In November of that year he visited Venice and was received with all the honor the city could muster. Still, at the end of his account Sanudo could not resist registering his skepticism, «Thus did the duke begin to repent, protesting his desire to be a good and loyal son of this Signoria.»²⁸ Beginning to repent while protesting his desire to do so was not quite the same as actually being repentant and loyal. Reviewing the nature and consequences of Ercole's turn away from Venice that led to the War of Ferrara affirms Venice as Ferrara's greatest threat and validates the importance of Borso's personal relationship with *La Serenissima*. Furthermore, it calls for a return to Borso's strategic policy with the Venetian republic, which bears further exploration.

III. Relations between Borso d'Este and Venice

«...voleva esser bon fiol di questo Stado»

Borso was not naïve about the nature of Venetian power; his approach to Venice was part of a realistic and coherent theory of statecraft, which can be traced back to his «Proposta fatta dalla corte Estense ad Alfonso I re di Napoli» written in 1445.²⁹ This was a report addressed to Alfonso d'Aragona written in the *speculum principis* tradition and offering advice on how to secure his still new rule in Naples while also seizing Lombardy. While the memorial was mostly interested in domestic politics, how to win power and keep it, there is a section where Borso analyzes the various Italian powers. He lists the five major Italian powers: the pope, the Venetians, Milan, Florence, and Francesco Sforza. Each hates Alfonso for various reasons. He begins with the Venetians, the most powerful state, who hate Alfonso but offer

²⁸*Città Excelentissima, Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marin Sanudo*, eds. P. H. LABALME and L. SANGUINETTI WHITE, trans. L. L. CARROLL, Baltimore 2008, pp. 67-8. See also T. DEAN, *After the War of Ferrara: Relations between Venice and Ercole d'Este, 1484 1505*, in *War, Culture, and Society in Renaissance Venice: Essays in Honour of John Hale...*, cit., pp. 73-98.

²⁹ This title is furnished by C. FOUCARD who published the document in the «Archivio storico per le province napoletane», IV, fasc. IV (1879), pp. 689-803. A more recent version with notes is T. MATARRESE, *Sulla lingua volgare della diplomazia Estense. Un Memoriale ad Alfonso d' Aragona*, «Schifanoia», V (1988), pp. 51-75. For an analysis of the «Proposta» see R. TRISTANO, «Lo amore deli subditi'...», cit.

him soothing words. They are duplicitous. They hate Alfonso because they recognize him as a powerful and magnanimous ruler who has the capacity to offend them and «... with their arrogance they desire that no one shall be greater than, or on par with their power, but that each dominion would be inferior and lacking power in order to be and to be able to boast being the greatest and most powerful lordship on the sea and on the land that may be found in Italy today.»³⁰ Borso recognized Venetian power and arrogance, her sense of superiority, and played off of them within the trope of an obedient son. He adroitly constructed his policy toward Venice to conform to her own self-identity.

A first clue to how this policy functioned in practice appeared in 1453 when Venice claimed Bagnacavallo, based on its proximity to Ravenna which they controlled. Sanudo noted how Borso approached the issue. He first sent a message that Bagnacavallo was his and that he was prepared to go to war. But then he sent his ambassadors to Venice saying that he wanted peace not war and «desired to be a good son of this state» (*voleva esser bon fiol di questo Stado*). Through these «benign words,» Sanudo continued, «the arms that he almost prepared to send, were calmed down and they approved making a judgment. And later saying that he wanted the borders with Venice made in the middle of Ferrara, he came with his boat and in the morning was in consultation with the *Collegio* which did not know of his coming, and the border was placed where the government wanted it, and Bagnacavallo remained with Borso.»³¹ Thus, Borso carefully constructed a response to Venetian

³⁰ T. MATARRESE, *Sulla lingua* (111-114 in Matarrese's numbering system, basically sentences)..., cit., p. 70 «... e cum la loro superbia desiderano, non che ninno sia ni mazore ni paro a loro de posanza, ma che zaschaduno sia minore de loro et mancho potente, per essere et poterse vanagloriare loro de essere li mazori et plu potenti Signori che hozidi se ritrovino in Italia, e in mare et in terra».

³¹ M. SANUDO, *Le vite dei dogi, 1423-1474* 2 vols. eds. A. CARACCILO ARICÒ and C. FRISON, Venice 1999-2004, pp. 499-500. «In questo tempo, havendo a pe[n]na deposto le armi, che susitò quasi un'altra guera con il Ducha Borsso di Ferrara per causa d'i confini di Ravena et altri luochi del Polesene ... Il qual Ducha mandò sui oratori a Venesia dicendo voler paxe ad ogni modo, et non guera, et esser disposto star che 'l sia visto li veri confini e quelli meter, perché voleva esser bon fiol di questo Stado, per le qual benigne parolle, le arme, che quasi si preparavano di mandar, fo acquietade, et deliberorno farli judicar... E dopoi esso Ducha Borso vene a Venecia dicendo voler i confini con la Signoria fusse in mezo di Ferrara, el qual vene con la sua barcheta, et la matina fo in Colegio - che non si sapeva della sua venuta - et fo posto li ditti confini dove volse la Signoria, e a lui li restò Bagnacavallo». See also L. BALDUZZI, *Bagnacavallo e l'ultima signoria degli Estensi, 1440-1598, appunti con documenti*, in «Atti e memorie della R. Deputazione di storia patria per

aggression: first a forceful threat of war, quickly followed by diplomatic overtures and promises of peace, culminating not only in personal negotiations embracing the familiar trope of loyal son, but acting out personally his subservience. The result was success and one of the concessions Venice made to Borso to which Conti referred.

The Venetians were not, of course, so naïve to take anyone at their word, not in a culture that perfected bad faith as a political tool. After Borso died the Ten perceived the need to strengthen the border with Ferrara.³² It was as if the best guarantee of Venetian security had been Borso himself, who traveled every year to the Adige frontier to demonstrate his faithfulness to Venice, as Conti pointed out. An even better example of Borso's filial piety and trustworthiness was in 1466 when he joined Venice in war to support the Florentine exiles' attempt to curb Piero de' Medici's control over the Florentine political system.³³

1464 was a momentous year. On 1 August Cosimo de' Medici died, succeeded by his son Piero. Two weeks later Pope Pius II also died. Borso had high hopes to be invested as duke of Ferrara when Pius was elected, for he claimed kinship with the pope through his mother Stella dell'Assassino, a Sienese, who was one of Niccolò III mistresses. But Pius and Borso did not hit it off, the latter's hints were rebuffed and relations deteriorated. A mere two weeks later Pietro Barbo was elected as Pope Paul II. He was to become one of Borso's most important benefactors. Coincidentally, the year before Borso had recalled to Ferrara his half-brothers Ercole and Sigismondo from the Neapolitan court, whereupon Borso came to rely on Ercole's prowess as military commander. Finally, in March 1466 Francesco Sforza died. With the personal relationship between him and Cosimo now broken reliance on the new duke, Giangaleazzo, was uncertain. These events allowed Borso to be more daring and he led Ferrara into a risky diplomatic gambit, but only within the close alliance with Venice.

le provincie di Romagna», s. III, vol. IV (1886), pp. 287-344, especially p. 308. Pardi's reading of this passage is completely different from my own. G. PARDI, *Borso d'Este...*, cit., pp. 190-191.

³² M.E. MALLETT and J.R. HALE, *The Military Organization of a Renaissance State*, New York 1984, p. 165.

³³ According to Sanudo, Borso really was a true and loyal son, again expressed in terms of familial relationships. Within Borso's own family he recalled his half-brothers from Naples, appointing Ercole governor of Modena and Sigismondo governor of Reggio, «thus nourishing them as sons», («... e doppio furono richiamati da Borso, e nutriti come figliuoli») M. SANUDO, *Commentarii della guerra di Ferrara...*, cit., p. 5.

In Florence leading members of the oligarchy, Angelo Acciaiuoli, Dietisalvi Neroni, Luca Pitti, and Niccolò Soderini who had collaborated with Cosimo de' Medici, viewed Piero as less adept and worthy of deference. This was an opportunity to roll back Medici manipulation of elections and traditional councils. As Marco Parenti put it, «... to take away from him [Piero] the overbearing position he had assumed.» To which he added in reference to Borso, » that he [Piero] had heard that at our border at the river Albo 800 horse and 6,000 infantry of the duke of Modena were drawn up against himself...».³⁴ In August 1466, thanks to the warning of Giovanni Bentivoglio, lord of Bologna, the attempt to intercept Piero, perhaps to assassinate him, failed. Piero asked Milan to send troops, while the exiles fled, some to Ferrara.

The Estense domains of Ferrara, Modena, and Reggio spanned east-west across almost the entire peninsula of Italy abutting all the major powers save Naples. Any army moving south had to cross Estense territory. All this made the Estense domains strategically important. Inevitably Ferrara was caught up especially in the animosity between Milan and Venice, trying to thread the needle between the two. This was a classic example of how smaller, weaker states had to negotiate being squeezed by larger, more powerful ones. It was no accident then that the two major disruptions during the Peace of Lodi were the War of 1467, sometimes known as the Colleanic war after the condottiero Bartolomeo Colleoni, and the War of Ferrara, with Ferrara at the center of both. The most prudent foreign policy was peaceful neutrality, but if war brought risks, it also brought opportunity. Why did Borso abandon his prudent neutrality to support the Florentine exiles? First, he acted with the collusion of Venice. Gardiner has Borso convincing the doge, Cristoforo Moro, to intervene on behalf of the exiles, while Chiappini depicts Borso more as intermediary between the two.³⁵ Most likely both are correct, that Borso's intervention was the product of his intimate relationship with Venice, but one in which Borso was unusually proactive.

³⁴ M. PHILLIPS, *The Memoir of Marco Parenti*, Princeton 1987, on the attack, p. 190; on Borso's troops on the border, 192. The politics following Cosimo's death and the plot against Piero can be conveniently accessed at W. INGEBORG, s.v. *Medici, Piero de'* *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Rome 2009, vol. 73.

³⁵ E. GARDINER, *Dukes and Poets...*, cit., p. 100; L. CHIAPPINI, *Gli Estensi...*, cit., p. 142.

Borso's motivations were several. His opposition to Francesco Sforza was well known. In the *Proposta* written two decades earlier, Borso had referred to Sforza as «a person of base blood and condition» while he described the House of Este as «almost loved more than God.» In the mid-Cinquecento, during the precedence controversy with Florence, Ferrarese propaganda disparaged the Medici as mere merchants while adulating their own antiquity.³⁶ Getting rid of both Medici and Sforza parvenus was tempting, but realpolitik was the main motivation. The deaths of Cosimo and Francesco Sforza provided an opportunity to destroy the Florence- Milan alliance. This was the principal allure for Venetian support. Finally, there was an unusually robust Florentine presence in Ferrara in the guise of the Strozzi family. There were two branches. Nanni di Carlo Strozzi came to Ferrara sometime before 1394 and served as lieutenant-general of Ferrarese forces during the minority of Niccolò III. This branch behaved not as exiles but quickly assimilated. They married into prominent Ferrarese families and received generous gifts of land from the Estensi. Tito Vespasiano was a notable courtly Latin poet and office holder while Lorenzo Strozzi was one of Borso's closest favorites. The other branch, that of Palla di Nofri, arrived later in the mid-1400s, as exiles from Medici rule in 1434. They never assimilated and one of Palla's sons, Giovanfrancesco, was implicated in the plot against Piero. Later in 1494, these Strozzi returned to Florence after the Medici were expelled.³⁷ The Florentines in Ferrara likely influenced Borso to intercede with the exiles which was synchronous with Venetian interests.

The plight of the Florentine exiles morphed into a plan to redraw the map of Italy that dangled the governance of Florence to Borso and destruction of the Milan-Florence-Naples alliance for Venice.³⁸ It was a dream, a tempting one, but a bold plan was needed. With Florence the

³⁶ T. MATARRESE, *Sulla lingua...*, cit., sentence 97, Francesco Sforza as a «persona de ville sangue et conditione,» whereas the Este are «più amata quaxi che non è Dio», sentence 85, both p. 69. On the precedence controversy see R. TRISTANO, "The Precedence Controversy and the Devolution of Ferrara: A Shift in Renaissance Politics", in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, XLVIII (2017), pp. 681-709.

³⁷ L. FABBRI, *Da Firenze a Ferrara. Gli Strozzi tra casa d'Este e antichi legami del sangue*, in *Alla corte degli Estensi, filosofia, arte e cultura a Ferrara nei secoli XV e XVI*, M. BERTOZZI ed., Ferrara 1995, on Gianfrancesco, pp. 91-108, especially pp. 98-9.

³⁸ On the possibilities of this scheme, see M. PHILLIPS, *Marco Parenti...*, cit., p. 212 n.9.

military weak link, with the support of the Florentine exiles, and with the armed intervention of Venice it had some prospects of success. Borso seized the opportunity.

Borso's letter to Ludovico Casella, dated 10 April 1467, is evidence of another example of Borso's personal diplomacy. It is an extraordinary document for it inverts the usual epistolary practice where the servant, typically an orator, writes to the prince, reporting on the goings-on at the court in question. Here it is Borso who reports to his *referendarius* or first secretary. Borso and Casella had an unusually intimate working relationship in which they clearly shared a secret strategy to which Borso gives Casella the green light to begin implementing.³⁹

Borso left Ferrara for Venice accompanied by an entourage that included his brother Alberto, his two favorites, Lorenzo Strozzi and Teofilo Calcagnini, and various officials. Upon arriving, he was greeted by the Doge (Cristoforo Moro) and other high officials who with much ceremony embraced him as each section of the city was ordered to hold some sort of celebration honoring Borso. All sorts of confections were supplied and Borso and his party were taken to the ducal palace accompanied by all the top officials. This was all the public demonstration of Borso as faithful son.

On Sunday Borso heard Mass at the Doge's chapel followed by the visit of a large number of the Venetian patriciate who paid their respects in their *piatti*.⁴⁰ They had conversations of substance, «And certainly we were listened to with such marvelous attention, so that we do not know how it could have been with more graciousness and good favor.»⁴¹ After dining, Borso was introduced to the patriarch of Venice, spent two hours in conversation with him, and who told Borso that he

³⁹ See his extended treatment of Casella, W. GUNDERSHEIMER, *Ferrara, the Style of a Renaissance Despotism...*, cit., pp. 146-51, especially p. 146.

⁴⁰ Flat boats often sumptuously decorated for public occasions and restricted to the use of the doge and others of high rank and station. See G. CASONI, *Breve storia dell'Arsenale note e cenni sulle forze militari, marittime e terrestri della Repubblica di Venezia*, Venice G. Antonelli 1847, pp. 129-131.

⁴¹ *Lettera di Borso d'Este, primo duca di Ferrara scritta da Venezia al suo referendario Ludovico Casella*, ed. G. PIVIDOR, Rovigo Minelli 1865, p. 11. «Et certo Nuj fossemo auditi cum tanta mirabile attentione. Che non sapiamo quanto mai piu la potesse essere stata piu piena de benignita et buona gratia».

believed that he had been sent by God.⁴² The next day four gentlemen visited Borso, Marco Cornaro, (*Consigliero grande*), Bernardo Giustiniano, senator and former pupil of Guarino (*Savio grande*), Giovanni Soranzo, and Giovanni Mocenigo (*Savi de la Guerra*). These were men of the oldest, highest-ranking families, who filled the ranks of doges, senators, cardinals, and bishops.⁴³ Borso met with them for more than two hours. These too were substantive discussions and Borso gushed over how they treated him, «how truly this lordship has never extended such welcome in the world to a visitor. And they spoke of me as their well cherished and beloved son». Then Borso alluded to the nature of the real business, to provide military support for the Florentine exiles under the command of Bartolomeo Colleoni. To his great delight Borso noted how much he was esteemed and claimed that the enterprise was a «boat» he was allowed to «steer» and which will greatly enhance his reputation.⁴⁴ Borso concluded ordering Casella to make all due preparations upon his return to Ferrara, leaving to him to publicize what he thought best, keeping silent about others.

⁴² This was Maffeo Girardi (or Gherardi), chosen by Venice to be the next patriarch in 1466, but not confirmed by the pope until 1468.

⁴³ Cornaro was of the illustrious family that included four doges, nine cardinals, and Caterina Cornaro, queen of Cyprus. Giustiniano was a senator, diplomat, and pupil of Guarino, who wrote an important history of Venice, Giovanni Mocenigo was later doge during War of Ferrara.

⁴⁴ *Lettera di Borso d'Este, primo duca di Ferrara scritta da Venezia...*, cit., 12. «Et perche tu intendi chel sia il vero, te significamo et certificamo, che li ragionamenti habiamo facto cum questoro hano si comossa la brigata, che di tracta hano scripto al Capitano Bartolomio. Che sia qua per conferire de summa rerum cum loro, et cum Nuj perche te racordamo che loro sono in gran parte inclinati a governare questa barca secondo il nostro parere. Et gran parte de loro dicono et protestano questo, quali appertamente laudando commendando sumamente li nostri racordi. Siche havendo Nuj questo manegio in mano nostra cum tanta nostra reputatione: pensa mo fra te: Se dovemo reputare et estimare grande, essendo Nuj apprezzati et estimati tanto, da una tanta Signoria come e questa».

«... because you understand just what is true, I mean and confirm that the discussions we have made with them have impressed the group, so that they took to write to Captain Bartolomeo, who is here to confer on the highest matters with them and with us, because we remind you that they are in great part inclined to steer this boat according to our counsel. And a great part of them say and declare this, openly praising and commending on high our thoughts. So, having this enterprise in our hands with so much of our reputation. If we must consider and value ourselves greatly, being esteemed and appreciated greatly by such a government such as this one».

Borso was clearly plotting a secret armed attack on Florence by Colleoni, which if successful would have undermined, perhaps destroyed, the Florence-Milan-Naples alliance with potentially destabilizing effect. Clearer still is Borso's well-known ego, his love of praise and concern for reputation. He revels in his elaborate reception by the most prominent Venetian authorities. But such a reception was not unique. What distinguishes it is what occurred behind closed doors, with strong indications that it was Borso who was steering the boat, the loyal son who was pushing the Venetians to intervene. This was another inversion of the norm; the son counseling the father. To be sure, this was possible because Ferrarese and Venetian interests coincided. The Venetians soon released Colleoni from his *condotta* in February 1467 and in April Ercole was awarded a contract with Venice with 1500 horse and a stipend of 15,000 ducats.⁴⁵ In the end Borso's carefully cultivated relationship with Venice proved crucial, and once again it was expressed in familial terms («they spoke of me as their well cherished and beloved son»). But this was a more assertive son, perhaps the leading player who was willing to act outside of his normal cautious neutrality.

Within three weeks of Borso's visit Colleoni's army crossed the Po and headed toward Florence. On the way Borso traveled with Colleoni on the Po on a Venetian *bucintoro* dining together.⁴⁶ Colleoni was reinforced by troops commanded by Ercole d'Este and Alessandro Sforza, while allied forces from Milan, Florence, and Naples were commanded by Federico da Montefeltro. The war culminated in the battle of Molinella, near Bologna, on 25 July 1467, the first one in Italy to use light artillery. It was a draw and negotiations for a peace dragged on for nearly a year. Borso was able to insert himself into the process as mediator, an assertive one. According to Malipiero, writing from the Venetian perspective, «Borso, duke of Modena, one of our confederates, made the Venetian government to understand that he had a way to make peace...the difficulties of an accord are two: one the pay for Signor Bartolomeo's expenses, the other that the Florentine

⁴⁵ That the Venetians released Colleoni in February 1467, suggests that they were already considering intervening in the armed conflict. On Ercole's *condotta*, *Diario ferrarese, Rerum italicarum scriptores* new ed., ed. G. PARDI, Bologna 1928, p. 47.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

exiles return to their houses.»⁴⁷ Borso proposed that the League contribute toward the first, while the exiles should not lose their property and be able to return to Florence in a year or two. Not surprisingly the league found these proposals unacceptable. Finally, in May 1468 Pope Paul II intervened to negotiate a peace maintaining the status quo while offering Colleoni command of an Italian crusading army against the Turk.⁴⁸ At the expressed wish of the doge, Borso was included among the principal states in the treaty, where he was referred to as «beloved son.»⁴⁹ All in all, the sentiment of the doge, Cristoforo Moro that «... the state of Venice and that of Ferrara were one and the same thing so that one could not be without the other was amply demonstrated.»⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the pope's intervention presaged the development of a second close relationship, more active diplomacy, and the culmination of Borso's foreign policy.

IV. Relations between Borso d'Este and Pope Paul II

«Solum in feras pius bellator pastor»

Pietro Barbo was born into a prosperous Venetian mercantile family in 1417.⁵¹ Through his mother's family (Condulmer) he was the nephew of Pope Eugenius IV, who in turn was the nephew of Pope Gregory XII. Originally trained for a life in commerce, he ultimately became a cleric.

⁴⁷ D. MALPIERO, *Annali veneti dal 1457 al 1500* ed. F. LONGO, *Archivio storico italiano* VII, part I (1843), p. 214. «Borso Duca de Modena, un de i nostri confederadi, ha fatto intender a la Signoria, che l'ha modo de praticar la pace con la ligha...le difficoltà dell'accordo son do: una de pagar la spesa fatta dal Signor Bortholamio; l'altra, che i fuorusciti de Fiorenza torni a casa». p. 214.

⁴⁸ On Colleoni and Molinella, see M. MALLETT, *Colleoni, Bartolomeo*, s.v. *Dizionario biografico* cit., XXVII (1982). The crusading army did not materialize, the Italian powers refusing to bankroll it. Recognizing his inability to return to Florence, Diotisalvi Neroni built a palace near Borso's residence in the Palazzo Schifanoia in 1469 and died in Rome in August 1482. *Diario ferrarese...*, cit., 58.

⁴⁹ D. MALPIERO, *Annali veneti...*, cit., p. 231, «dilectum filium Borsium ducem Mutinae, ac Marchionem Ferrariensem.»

⁵⁰ «... lo stato di Venezia e quel di Ferrara erano una cosa medesima talmente uniti che l'uno non potrebbe star senza l'altro». Cited by PARDI, *Borso d'Este...*, cit., p. 269 n.1.

⁵¹ On Paul II see I. ROBERTSON, *Pietro Barbo – Paul II: Zentilhomio de Uenecia e Pontificio*, in *War, Culture, and Society in Renaissance Venice: Essays in Honour of John Hale...*, cit., pp. 147-72; *Dizionario biografico...* cit., vol. 81, s.v. «Paolo II, Papa» and *Italia durante il papato di Paolo II*, at <https://cronologia.leonardo.it/storia/aa1464a.htm>.

He advanced quickly, becoming cardinal at age twenty-three and bishop of Vicenza in 1451. In 1459 he was named bishop of Padua by Pius II but was blocked from assuming the office by the Venetian state. After a long stand-off he withdrew. His relationship with his native city never fully recovered. Paul also contended with the Roman Academy, a society of well-educated young men dedicated to the classics. He suspected them of paganism, even heresy. They dominated the papal secretaries (*abbreviatori*), much expanded by Pius, with links to cardinals and a plot to assassinate Paul. Paul dissolved the academy; many members fled; some were imprisoned. Among the latter was Platina who expressed his enmity in his *Lives of the Popes*, where he described Paul as «a great enemy and despiser of human learning».⁵² This was undeserved, for while less interested in literature, Paul was an avid collector of ancient artifacts and reader of ancient history. He shared with Borso a love of pomp and display which earned him popularity among the Romans.

Paul was a strong advocate of the liberty of the church which led to conflicts with Venice, Milan, and Florence over jurisdictional issues such as the ability to tax clergy. At first, Paul had amicable relations with Naples, but they soured when Paul attempted to seize the fortress of Tolfa that guarded the alum mines while Ferdinand supported the Orsini against the pope.⁵³ He feared an attack by Ferdinand of Naples and like Borso he supported the claims of Jean d'Anjou to the kingdom. He attempted to reassert papal sovereignty over Romagna, which pleased almost no one, especially Venice which possessed Ravenna and had considerably penetrated the territory.⁵⁴ This led to armed conflict with Roberto Malatesta of Rimini. His father, Sigismondo, died without a legitimate male heir and Paul moved to occupy the city. The league of Milan, Naples, and Florence supported Roberto, which forced the pope to ally with Venice, who proved to be a tepid collaborator. The pope confided in Giacomo Trotti, Borso's ambassador to Rome, that

⁵² PLATINA (BARTOLOMEO SACCHI), *The Lives of the Popes from the Accession of Gregory VII to the Death of Paul II*, ed. Rev. W. BENHAM, London: Farran, Okeden & Welsh, s.d. For a defense of Paul see A. J. DUNSTON, *Pope Paul II and the Humanists* in «Journal of Religious History», VII (1973), pp. 287-306.

⁵³ *Italia durante il papato di Paolo II...*, cit., n. 40.

⁵⁴ G. COZZI and M. KNAPTON, *Storia della repubblica di Venezia...*, cit., p. 66.

«no state in Italy wants him to have Rimini». (*niuna potenza d'Italia non vuole che egli habbia Rimini*) He was wrong; Borso d'Este did.⁵⁵

On 11 September 1469 Ercole d'Este departed Ferrara «to go to the encampment of the Church at the request of Pope Paul II, who had made camp before the city of Rimini...and it was said that that on that day the League, that is the Florentines, the followers of Count Galeazzo, duke of Milan, and Don Ferrante, King of Naples, routed the forces of the Church and wounded Alessandro of Pesaro in two places, but this defeat was not too damaging.»⁵⁶ Not too damaging to the Church, perhaps, and very useful to Borso. On 22 December 1470 a peace treaty was signed between Paul II, Naples, Venice, Milan, Florence, and Borso and in January 1471 a great celebration was held in Ferrara to commemorate it. Less than three months later Paul invited Borso to Rome to have his vicariate raised to a duchy.⁵⁷ The pope had found the duke of Modena a helpful ally, the only power who was willing to help Paul reclaim Rimini. The reward was one of Borso's greatest policy successes.

All the Ferrarese sources and a good number of the others mention Borso's journey to Rome, some at great length. They all focus on the sheer size and magnificence of Borso's retinue.⁵⁸ But they do not recognize the link between Borso's investiture as duke of Ferrara and

⁵⁵ P. DOVER suggests that Paul was perhaps the most unpopular pope of the Renaissance period which may explain his affection for Borso in gratitude for his lone support. See P. DOVER, *'Saper la mente della soa Beatudine': Pope Paul II and the Ambassadorial Community in Rome (1464-1471)*, «Renaissance & Reformation» XXXI (2008) pp. 3-34, especially p. 9.

⁵⁶ «... si partite del Ferrarexe, venendo da Modena, per andare in lo campo de la Giesia ad instantia di Papa Paulo Secondo, il quale havea mettudo campo a la citade di Arimine. . . Et fu dicto che in dicto giorno la Liga, cioè la gente de Fiorentini, del conte Galeazzo duca de Milano, di Dom Ferrante Re de Napoli, havea roto la gente de la Giesia et haveva ferito [il] signore Alessandro de Pesaro in dui luogi; ma dicta rota non fu però de tropo damno.» *Diario ferrarese...*, *cit.*, p. 62. Alessandro was Alessandro Sforza, lord of Pesaro, which had been held by the Malatesta. The correct date of the battle was 30 August. Malatesta enjoyed a measure of revenge when he commanded part of the Venetian army in the War of Ferrara.

⁵⁷ The chronology of Borso's journey to Rome was: Spring, 1471, negotiations over investiture completed; 13 March, Borso departs Ferrara; 1 April, Borso arrives before the city of Rome; Palm Sunday (7 April) Consistory approves Borso's investiture; Easter Sunday (14 April) Borso invested as duke of Ferrara; 15 April, Borso receives Golden rose; 18 May, Borso returns to Ferrara.

⁵⁸ See, for example, M. CANESI, *De vita et pontificato Pauli Secundi P.M.* in *Le vite di Paolo II di Gaspare da Verona e Michele Canesi*, ed. G. ZIPPEL, *Rerum italicarum scriptores* new ed. vol. III, part 16, pp. 170-171.

his strategy to win the confidence of Pope Paul. The Ferrarese notary, Ugo Caleffini's account (see n.59) at least has the advantage of being among the most succinct.⁵⁹

What impresses is the sheer size of both the ducal and papal parties. Paul and Borso were kindred spirits who shared a love for the ostentatious and a desire to impress. Caleffini, a notary, was a numbers man, emphasizing the grand scale of it all. In modern terms it was a publicity extravaganza. But this is not to ignore some deeper significances. The two most important messages of the preparations are first the serious religious tone of the enterprise. This was no mere

⁵⁹ A. CAPPELLI, *Notizie di Ugo Caleffini notaro ferrarese dell secolo XV con la sua cronaca in rima di casa D'Este*, «Atti e memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Province Modenesi», II (1864), Appendix III, pp. 267-312., especially p. 306. «On Wednesday the 13th of March 1471, the Illustrious Lord Duke Borso departed Ferrara for Rome, invited by the Holy Father, Pope Paul II, from the Venetian family of Barbo, in a beautiful and honorable company. [Before he left, Borso] organized a demonstration in Ferrara. On that day all the shops were closed in the morning and he attended the Mass of the Holy Spirit, the Duke standing there with great reverence. Then exiting the Church, he touched the hands of the people, both the great and the small, praying to God that he would return safe and sound. And the day before, which was the 12th, the said Duke called together all the gentlemen and citizens before him in court, to whom he told of his visit to Rome, and he took off from them, recommending the state to them and comforting them to remain in holy peace and charity. Then after dinner on the 13th, he left, leading the following company, passing through the main piazza and moving over the bridge of San Giorgio.

«First, passed 175 mules covered in blankets of white, red and green livery, and another 75 with his own personal belongings, covered with crimson velvet with his arms embroidered in gold, the same 75 mules wore silver bells around their necks. Then passed 80 men on foot dressed anew, all with the ducal device, with four dogs per hand, that is, greyhounds, hunting dogs, and big dogs. Then followed 500 men mounted on horses, dressed in gold and silver brocade; succeeded by the trumpets and fifes dressed in gold cloth followed by the grooms garbed in silver brocade, the knights in golden cloth, and the squires dressed in silver brocade and many others. Accompanying the duke were Gurone, his brother, Alberto da Este his other brother, Nicolò de Contrari, his cousin, Teofilo Calcagnino, Marco Pio, lord of Carpi, the esteemed Matteo Maria Boiardo, count of Scandiano, Galeotto lord of Mirandola, and Nicolò lord of Correggio, and many other gentlemen from Ferrara, Modena and Reggio, the most beautiful and rich company that was ever seen... Monsignor Spalatro, papal treasurer met him and led him to Rome with all his own beautiful and noble company, with up to a thousand horses all paid for out of the papal purse. Upon entering Rome, he was met by 17 Cardinals, of whom there were never more in Rome, and from a great multitude of horses, estimated at over 7,000. And all the streets were adorned with branches and plants: and it was said publicly by all the Romans that there was never an entry in Rome like this before, neither by king nor emperor, with so great honor, as for this duke».

dukedom but part of a papally-sanctioned process as much religious as it was secular. There is no reason to doubt that Borso, who attended daily Mass, viewed it in spiritual terms; nor that Paul II had chosen Easter Sunday, the most solemn day in the liturgical year, to create an occasion of maximum spiritual gravity. The second message was how it all fit into what had been twenty years of careful image-building and maneuvering by Borso, a process both foreign and domestic. In Caleffini's account Borso allowed physical intimacy touching the hands of both the meek and poor and the high and mighty. Caleffini's account is essentially a communal one. It is literally a family affair, including Borso's brothers, but also the petty lords dependent on Borso and court favorites like Calcagnini. This was Borso's constellation of power. But it also links the body of the duke to the city and its wellbeing. He cautions the body politic, again both gentlemen and citizens, to keep the peace, comforting them, because with the absence of the ducal body there is greater risk of unrest. Finally, the entire party processes through town, the main square and over the principal bridge and out of the city. It is the court, the corporate identity of the duke, on the move through the center of town with all of the symbols of ducal, communal, and familial authority, the Old Castle, the town hall, the cathedral, and the statues of Borso and his father Niccolò III displayed. All this is reciprocated in Rome, where the princes of the church, the nobility, and all of Rome publicly acknowledge that the magnificence of it all is unsurpassed. All of the pomp communicates the power of both lord and vassal and the importance of the occasion.

Of all the Ferrarese sources two stand out. The first is Borso's letter to his secretary, Giovanni Compagno. It is the companion of the letter to (the deceased) Casella that Borso wrote from Venice. Borso perceives receipt of the golden rose as raising up not only himself as an individual but his entire house, «... he [Pope Paul II] greatly magnified us and our house, commemorating some excellent benefits made for our house by the Holy Church.»⁶⁰ He acknowledges, in sacramental terms, his long-held desire to receive this new dignity «in satisfaction of our long desire, as you know we have had, to take that sacrament from his

⁶⁰ *Lettera inedita di Borso d'Este al suo segretario Giovanni di Compagno*, Ferrara: Domenico Taddei, 1869, p. 25 «...magnifico assai et nui et la casa nostra, commemorando alcuni beneficij eccelenti fatti per la casa nostra a Santa Chiesa».

hands.»⁶¹ Indeed, Borso perceives the ducal dignity as exceptional because it is received from the pope himself, on Easter Sunday at high Mass with benediction, and in Saint Peter's. It confers special authority «through the dignity of the duchy of Ferrara, which is so much more excellent in so far as it proceeds from he who holds the place of Christ on earth. Moreover, we have been up to now the Vicar of the Holy Church, but with this new title we ascend to greater [status], and we will be able to dispose of things in Ferrara and beyond with our freedom, and with many other good and worthy ways.»⁶² Borso now saw himself as a bigger player in Quattrocento politics.

Borso returned to Ferrara on 18 May. He was already seriously ill, lingered for a few months and died on 20 August. This was bad luck for Francesco Ariosto Peregrino who made the best of it by dedicating his account of Borso's investiture as duke to his successor, Ercole d'Este. At forty-two folio pages the *Dicta de la fortunata e felice entrata in Roma de lo illustrissimo Duca Borso* is by far the longest account of Borso's trip to Rome.⁶³ The document is adulatory and after twenty years of rule Ariosto was familiar with the themes in Borsian image-making and adept at hitting the right notes. And so it contains extravagant passages such as «... there our divine, devout, and exalted lord followed, all happy and joyful and lordly and resplendent with his cesarean appearance decorated with gold and gems, on that great steed, all refulgent that blazed in those studied and admired garments. Showing himself at once as prince, another triumphant Caesar worthy of Borsian serenity.»⁶⁴ But it also contains some useful clues to what Ariosto perceived as important. So as Borso approaches the Milvian Bridge, like a new Constantine, he is met by «Messer Andrea Vendremino and

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 21 «...in satisfacione di quell longo desiderio nostro: como tu sai havemo havuto de pigliar cotanto Sacramento de le sue mane».

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 16, «...per ditta dignità del Ducato di Ferrara: quale è tanto più eccellente quanto che la procede da chi tiene il luogo di Cristo in terra; oltre che anco fin qui siamo stato Vicario di Santa Chiesa: ma con questo nuovo titolo ascendendo ad majora, potremo disporre di Ferrara et restarne pro libito nostro, et con molte altre parte buone et degne».

⁶³ E. CELANI, *La venuta di Borso d'Este in Roma l'anno 1471* in «Archivio della R. società romana di storia patria», XIII, fasc. 3-4 (1890), pp. 361-450. This includes Ariosto's text.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 401. «... quivi il nostro divo, pio et excleso signore succedea tutto lieto e giocondo e signorile e respandente cum quel so cesareo aspecto ornado d'oro e giemme, su quel magno dextriero tuto refulgente che vampeza in quei guarnimenti artificiossimi e de valuta. Monstravasi più tosto el principe un altro triumphante cesare che la so digna serenità Borsiana.»

Messer Aloise Foscarino, ambassadors of *La Serenissima*, the ducal lordship of Venice, with approximately two hundred horses, who immediately met the ducal excellency and otherwise respecting him, kissing him, and embracing him, as if he were the father of that very wise Venetian Senate.»⁶⁵ Thus Ariosto acknowledges Borso's special relationship with Venice while inverting the paternal relationship for his benefit.

Ariosto underpins other traditional themes with many references to Borso's legendary cheerful countenance (*giocundo conspecto Borsiano*). Special emphasis is placed on his piety, for example, as he approached the pope at the ceremony, «These being fit in consideration of such religious things, of such solemn ceremonies, our very meek prince all open to a zealous, spiritual devotion step by step moved toward the throne, and three times with appropriate reverence knelt before prostrating himself on the ground before the holy pontifical feet... [which he] graciously and humbly and with singular trust, kissed.»⁶⁶ Borso is an obedient son of the church, «He is therefore known through the past as our most illustrious Duke Borso, for each time of his principality he is borne as the most obedient son of the holy Church and as the most faithful servant of the pontifical majesty of our pontiff Pope Paul.»⁶⁷ While individuated, Borso's virtues are also embedded in the House of Este, which Paul celebrated when he bestowed on Borso the Golden Rose, reminiscent of the Estensi's old Guelf allegiance «. . . leading on the battlefield His Holiness certain of the very illustriousness of your forebears and ancestors, of your very fortunate Estense kin with many other barons and princes of great affairs, which in regiments and in feats of arms were carried out, so courageously and

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 402. «... messer Andrea Vendremino e messer Aloise Foscarino, oratori de la serenissima ducal Signoria de Venetia, cum circa docento cavalli, quali subito che rincontrorno [403] la excellentia ducale non altramente la reverirono, la basirono, la abbraciarono che se la fosse padre de quelle sapientissimo Senato de Venetia.»

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 410, «Quivi essendo rapti noi in consideratione de tante religiose cosse, de tante solenne cerimonie, ecco il nostro mansuetissimo principe tuto accesso d'una zelante devotione spirituale a passo a passo si mosse verso el truono, tre fiade cum digna reverentia inzenochiandosi prima chel si gitasse prostrato a terra avanti quegli sanctificadi piedi pontificali...quegli essendogli gratiosament porti humilmente e cum singular fiducia basiò».

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 412, «Egli è adunque noto come per adrieto il nostro illustrissimo duca Borso per ciascuno tempo del so principato si sia portado da obedientissimo figliulo di sancta Chiesa e da fidelissimo servidor de la pontifical maestà del nostro summo s. Paulo».

valorously in every respect are judged immortal.»⁶⁸ Finally, there are references to Borso's «sound counsel» (*sano consiglio*) and Borso's reputation as peacemaker in contemporary Italy. «. . . all of these magnificent things were assigned [to Borso] because of the great and worthy estimation and sublime reputation which are today habitually maintained...his prudence, strength, temperance and justice, his faithful nurturing, how it is well known that each of these very worthy virtues have flourished throughout his life, has been applied to the greatest part of Italy, with these desired and longed for arts of peace. . .».⁶⁹ Borso is the pious, happy, obedient, wise-counseling, peacemaking scion of an illustrious lineage, and the faithful ally of Venice and the Roman pontiff.

There was much that was medieval both in and out of the investiture that mirrored activity at Borso's court. The pope created Borso a Knight of Saint Peter, laying golden spurs at his feet and blessing the sword and tapping him three times on the back while charging him with defending «the Church, widows, and orphans, and all the servants of God against the cruelty of pagans.» Borso then recited an act of fealty «reading the formula of fidelity to the Holy Church and every true pontiff for the maintenance of justice.»⁷⁰ Afterwards, there was a joust in the guise of the carnivalesque celebration of Agone and Testaccio. The Ferrarese were divided between the «Diamonds,» (*Diamante*) partisans of Ercole and «Sails» (*Vela*), followers of Niccolò di Leonello.⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 443, «Inducea in campo la So Sanctità certi ill^{mi} de li antecessori proavi e progenitori vostri excellentissimi de questa vostra fortunatissima gente estense cum multi altri baroni e principi de grande affare, quale et in regimenti et in facti d'arme se erano portadi si strenua e valorosamente che per ogni respecto sono giudicati immortali.»

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 430, «. . . tute queste magnificentie si assignano facte a la magna e digna estimatione e sublime reputatione nella quale hogidì è habuido e tegnudo la excelsa dignatione del divino principe nostro per la so prudentia, forteza, temperanza e per la giusticia so fidele nutrice, come è notorio che in ciascuna di queste laudatissime virtù per tuto il tempo de so vita sia fiorito, o se sia che armezando la maxima parte de Italia, epso cum queste desiande e bramande arte de la pace. . . ».

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 18-19.

⁷¹ A. FRIZZI, *Memorie per la storia di Ferrara*, 5 vols. 2nd ed., Ferrara Servadio 1848, rist. Bologna 1970, IV, p. 77. M. CANESI, *Le vite di Paolo II di Gaspare da Verona e Michele Canesi...*, cit., vol. III, part XVI, p. 170. «Ludos insuper Agonales, more vetusto, adhibitis indo- mitis tauris, in campo Testaceo ei splendidissime agi fecit». Borso's affection for jousting is well recorded, *Diario ferrarese...*, cit., 1 May 1462 p. 44; 13 May 1464 p. 45; and

In addition, since Borso's favorite pastime was hunting and Paul ordered a sumptuous hunt and placed his nephew, Marco Barbo, Cardinal-Priest of San Marco, in charge of preparations.⁷² «The duke of Modena, who had gone to Rome, was viewed solemnly by the pope, and he made great a great show of celebrations. On the feast day of Easter, the Pope created him duke of Ferrara. It was grandly displayed. The pope prepared a hunt where there participated nearly all of the cardinals. It was estimated that there were more than 25,000 people at that hunt. For the hunt the pope had slaughtered one hundred steers and a hundred calves, with many other wild game, chickens and fowlings.»⁷³ Paul commemorated the event with a bronze medallion that featured a bust of himself wearing the *pluviale* on which is displayed images of Peter and Paul. On his chest is a *rationale* on which is depicted his coat of arms. On the reverse are woods out of which darts a wild boar, a stag, and hares pursued by hounds and a mounted hunter, in the background is a beater with a stick, although he also appears to be wearing something resembling a miter. At the bottom appears the motto SOLUM IN FERAS PIUS BELLATOR PASTOR («The pious shepherd wages war only on wild beasts»)⁷⁴ In a final gesture of his favor Paul met with Borso «secretly,» presumably to discuss what had become a strategic alliance.

25 June 1468 p. 51. In May 1463 Borso traveled to Venice to participate in a tournament Ibid., p. 45.

⁷² PLATINA, *Lives of the Popes...*, cit., p. 295.

⁷³ *Cronaca di Ser Guerriero da Gubbio* ed. G. MAZZATINTI, *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, new ed., Città di Castello 1902, p. 88. «El duca de Modena, che era andato a Roma, fo dal papa solenemente veduto, et facto gram demustratione de feste. In le feste de la Pasqua el papa el fecie duca de Ferara. Fo grandemente apresentato. El papa fecie cacciare; dove cie intervenero quasi tucti cardinali. Fo stimato che a quella caccia fossero più de xxv^m persone. Fecie el papa amazare cento boi et cento vitelle, senza altre cagiagione, polli et ucelagione.» In July 1462 Ludovico Gonzaga came to Ferrara for a hunt with Borso. *Diario ferrarese...*, cit., p. 44.

⁷⁴ For the image, V. BELLINI, *Delle monete di Ferrara trattato di Vincenzo Bellini* Ferrara G. Rinaldi 1761, p. 128 and table 4 and A. POWNALL, *Papal Medals of the Fifteenth Century*, «The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Numismatic Society», IV (1884), pp. 173-4; C. DU MOLINET, *Historia summorum pontificum a Martino V ad Innocentium XI per eorum numismata, ab anno 1417 ad anno 1678*, Paris s.e. 1679, p. 15.



V. Conclusion: Memory and the Politics of Borso d'Este

«Non è più il tempo di Duca Borso»

In December 1469 Borso d'Este wrote to Lorenzo de' Medici on the death of his father Piero.⁷⁵ (see n. 75) The letter shows all the signs of a

⁷⁵ A. CAPPELLI, *Consolatoria di Borso d' Este duca di Ferrara al mag. Lorenzo de' Medici per la morte del padre* in «Atti e memorie delle RR. deputazioni di storia patria per le provincie modenesi e parmensi», III (1865), pp. 355-360, especially pp. 357-8. «Quanto dolore et quanto af fanno et molestie de animo habiamo retenuto per la morte del Mag.^o et Clar. Piedro vostro padre, difficile cosa ni seria cum littere explicarlo: perchè essendo Nuj stati coniuncti del continuo de singulare amore, benevolentia et stretta amicitia cum lui et prima col magnifico Cosmo vostro avo, et cum tutta la casa di Medici, quale vin culo di mutua carità hebbe dolce et gratioso principio da li nostri Illmi predecessori, et essi conservato et conservasi tuttavia meglio da Nuj successori; non solamente per il grande amore vi portiamo, partecipemo cum V. Spect. del dolore per la perdita di cussi digno et eccellente padre, la cui prestantia, mirabile inzegno, et eximie virtude certo più longa vita meritavano: ma etiandio in nostra specialità grandemente ci do lemo, parendoni haver facto una grave iactura de uno vero et optimo nostro amico come ni era vostro padre, et Nui altresì eravamo suo».

«How much pain and grief and trouble of the soul have we felt over the death of Magnificent and Illustrious Piero, your father, too difficult to express in letters, because being united by a continuous and singular love, benevolence, and close friendship with him and previously with the Magnificent Cosimo, your grandfather, and with all of the house of Medici. These bonds of mutual charity had such a sweet and gracious beginning from our most illustrious predecessors and have been preserved, kept, and furthermore bettered by us, their successors, not only through the great love we bear for Your Worthiness, as we share the pain of the loss of such a worthy and excellent father, whose prowess, marvelous intelligence, and remarkable virtue certainly merited a longer life. Also, in our particularly great pain, seeming to have made a grave sacrifice of one of our true and excellent friends, as your father was to us and also as we were to him».

professional scribe's pen, yet it also reveals a beautiful heartfelt sentiment. It is difficult to probe the inner life of someone who lived four hundred and fifty years ago, especially someone like Borso d'Este, who was not only a public figure but who cultivated such a distinct public persona. Is it possible for Borso to have felt sincere sympathy for a man who only a few years before he plotted to undermine, perhaps even have assassinated, and who in turn had a hand in the Pio conspiracy to assassinate Borso?⁷⁶ The answer, I think, is yes and the evidence is his ability to separate and join the public and the private with considerable flexibility. Indeed, Giorgio Chittolini has noted how «permeable» the Renaissance state was to «private» powers.⁷⁷ If Borso could conflate so thoroughly the religious and the political in his investiture ceremony on Easter Sunday, he could separate the political from the personal. Borso was not alone in plotting against a fellow ruler one moment, entertaining and flattering him the next, such was the flexibility of Renaissance statesmanship. In the end and despite propagandistic about the Medici as mere merchants, Borso would have recognized them as a great and powerful family and his diplomacy would have been prudent in paying them respect. Finally, Borso's emphasis on «predecessors» and «successors» places the letter in the context of family, a concept that was dear to him. Such prudence was recognized by Conti in that Borso was unusually faithful to the Venetian republic which was well understood by the Venetian authorities. They were themselves hard men used to betraying and forgiving and so the recollection of Borso's allegiance stood out, was noticed, because it was unusual, and remembered. In the end, though, our ability to know and understand Borso's inner self is limited. We are left, therefore, mostly with the public Borso and his diplomatic gestures.⁷⁸ Perhaps the best link between the public and the private realms is memory.

⁷⁶ On Piero's (and Galeazzo Sforza's) involvement in the Pio conspiracy see E. GARDINER, *Dukes and Poets...*, cit., p. 103 and L. CHIAPPINI, *Gi Estensi...*, cit., pp. 155-56.

⁷⁷ G. CHITTOLINI, *The "Private," the "Public..."*, cit., p.546. "The state was, in short, a system of institutions, of powers and practices, that had as one of its defining features a sort of programmatic permeability to extraneous (or, if one prefers, "private") powers and purposes while retaining an overall unity of political organization

⁷⁸ CHITTOLINI, *The "Private," the "Public..."*, cit., p.546. «An attempt to sort out the elements that might be called "private" or "public" in a modern sense would run the risk of generating anachronisms, for the demarcation line between the two concepts as not yet

Melissa M. Bullard has explored the idea of Lorenzo de' Medici between myth and history.⁷⁹ In establishing the mythical Lorenzo, we need not go far beyond Francesco Guicciardini's judgment in his *History of Italy* that thanks to Lorenzo pre-1494 Italy was idyllic, «[t]he greatest peace and tranquility reigned everywhere.»⁸⁰ We know that peace and tranquility reigned nowhere in Italy for very long, not even during the «peace» of Lodi, yet someone as perceptive and hard-bitten as Guicciardini could veer that far from reality. He was myth-building while writing history as he pondered what had transpired in Italy since Lorenzo's death.⁸¹ Bullard concludes that myth is not antithetical to history but in close proximity, they are two sides of the same coin. Myths being retrospective can also be reductive distilling the essences of persons and offering glimpses of their lives. Equally valuable is that she provides criteria for Lorenzan myth-building and they reveal close parallels with Borso's life and career. Myths were self-directed and patronized. Francesco Ariosto's account of Borso's trip to Rome intended for Borso himself is one example. Like Lorenzo, Borso used art to develop myth, and so the Schifanoia frescos depicted the always smiling duke while its Sala dei Stucchi and the bronze statue of Borso celebrated his zeal for justice. If Lorenzo cultivated the reputation of Florence as the center of a new artistic and literary style, Borso fostered his own reputation as reconciler and peacemaker, and glorified the

drawn according to the political geometry of absolutism. » It is worth noting that Florence sent a considerable contingent of forty horse to express condolences to Ercole on the death of Borso, revealing perhaps the commonality of such official commiseration. On the other hand, Galeazzo Sforza sent no condolences and instead occupied the town of Villanuova di Tortona, probably to convey his support for Niccolò di Leonello as the legitimate successor of Borso. U. CALEFFINI, *Croniche, 1471-1494*, «Deputazione provinciale di storia patria, Serie Monumenti», XVIII (2006), on the Florentines, pp. 11-12; on Galeazzo, p. 7.

⁷⁹ M. M. BULLARD, *The Magnificent Lorenzo de' Medici: between Myth and History*, in *Politics and Culture in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honour of H.G. Koenigsberger*, eds. P. MACK and M. C. JACOB, Cambridge 1987, pp. 25-58.

⁸⁰ F. GUICCIARDINI, *The History of Italy*, trans. and ed. S. ALEXANDER, New York 1969, p. 4.

⁸¹ The myth-building historian par excellence in Ferrara was Giovan Battista Pigna, whose massive history of the Estensi depicts Borso as arbiter of Italy, forever neutral, pacifying aggression, and beloved by all. He has a section titled «Borso dead during happy times», (*Borso morto in tempo felice*) and like Guicciardini contrasts the wellbeing of his reign in light of the disasters yet to come. G.B. PIGNA, *Historia de principi di Este di Gio. Batt. Pigna, a donno Alfonso secondo, duca di Ferrara*, Ferrara Francesco de' Rossi 1570, p. 619.

house of Este. Lorenzo acted as the arbiter of good taste while the accounts of Borso's journey to Rome emphasize the magnificence of his dress and jewels.⁸²

Myths are historical in that both interpret the past. As Guicciardini demonstrated, so much depended on the coincidence of Lorenzo's death and the French invasion just two years later. So too did the disaster of the War of Ferrara, which nearly cost Ercole his domain, enhance the perception of Borso's wise policies and sound counsel and cemented his reputation as a peaceful prince. As Guicciardini suggested, that while the actions of other Italian princes caused the French invasion, if only they had been like Lorenzo the disaster could have been avoided. So too the loss of the Polesine of Rovigo could have been avoided if only Ercole would have continued Borso's allegiance to Venice. Bullard points out the many references to the love of the Florentine people for Lorenzo. Here the Estensi clearly surpass the Medici, for in the three hundred years of their rule in Ferrara there were no popular revolts. And while Borso experienced the plot of the Pio family, the stability of Estensi rule in the form of the «contractual state,» in which the nobility pledged obedience to the marquis in return for exemptions and protections, far exceeded the Medici who were exiled twice in the fifteenth century. In the end, while Lorenzo is far better known than Borso today, in the fifteenth century Borso may well have been the more famous.⁸³ Lorenzo's fame seems more the product of a post-Burckhardtian conception of the Renaissance as *kulturgeschichte*, the state as a work of art, with Lorenzo presiding over the magnificent artistic achievements of Florence. Borso created his own artistry, the statecraft peculiar to a middling power wedged between the more powerful. It too morphed into myth. Its first tenet was stability, the stability of faithful and subservient support of Venice and pious allegiance to the papacy.⁸⁴ These traits were not chosen arbitrarily, Venice being the closest, most powerful neighbor with direct access to Ferrara and her institutions through the *visdomino*, while the papacy

⁸² On the memory of Borso's magnificence in dress, see note 96.

⁸³ On the «contractual state» T. DEAN, *Ferrara and Mantua...*, cit., p. 130. W. GUNDERSHEIMER, *Ferrara, the Style of a Renaissance Despotism ...*, cit., pp. 171-2 points out the many contemporary sources mentioning Borso, overwhelmingly positively.

⁸⁴ Since I am dealing with Borso's foreign policy here, the domestic parallels to political stability and continuity are not explored but could be sampled in R. TRISTANO, *Lo amore deli subditi'...*, cit.

was the overlord of the marchesi d'Este as papal vicars. This policy can be named *la politica di stabilità*, the politics of stability.⁸⁵

The importance of Borsian political stability provides a response to Pardi's accusation that Borso's statecraft lacked elevated principles that promoted equilibrium and a stable foundation. It seems that one day as Giacomo Trotti, Borso's ambassador to the papal court, was pressing the Holy Father once again to invest Borso as duke (see n. 86). Pope Paul II responded that he found Borso to be «*ambizioso et borioso*.» (ambitious and prideful) Borso replied in a long letter to Trotti, which is nothing less than a strategy to use pomp to perfect and stabilize rule.⁸⁶ This concept can be called *la politica di pompa e fasto*, the politics

⁸⁵ Borsean stability was both peculiar to him and his foreign policy and consonant with the Estense tradition of previous papal installations.

⁸⁶ Borso to Giacomo Trotti, orator to Rome, 13 June 1468, excerpted in Marco Folin, *Borso a Schifanoia, il Salone dei Mesi come speculum principis* in *Il Palazzo Schifanoia a Ferrara* eds. S. SETTIS and W. CUPPERI, Modena 2007, pp. 9-50, especially pp. 78-9. « La sua Beatitudine se attacha a tarrezarne molto che siamo ambizioso et borioso ... et che cum la nostra ambitione havemo pur raducta la Casa nostra in maiore reputatione che mai la fusse. Però il se vuole che tu faci intendere ala sua Beatudine che 'l ni grava bene che altri ni damni de superbia, et che lo è in grandissimo errore chadauno che ni stimi superbo ni ambizioso, cunciosia che se havemo cercho de exaltare la Casa l'havemo facto più ferme ragione et perpetue sopra de Regio et de Modena et sopra di altri nostri luogi del Imperio, sotto il titolo del ducato cha per altra vanagloria, laonde che innanti le ragione dela Casa nostra erano molto debile et temporale dal Imperio. Il perché ogniuno ha più tosto da commendare ciò che havemo cercho, cha ascrivernelo et imputarnelo a pompa. Cunciosia che havemo da mo' la ragione in quilli luogi perfecte et perpetue secundo Idio et secundo il mundo, ove che prima il se poteva dire che la Casa nostra le tenesse quasi senza ragione, ma per una certa continuatione - como fano multi altri che tengono di luogi cum puocha conscientia, ni se curando de fortificare le sue ragione come havemo facto nui, da buono et catolico Signore et come voressemo che la sua santità ni facesse per Ferrara, quando una volta il vorà».

«His Beatitude maintains that we are ambitious and arrogant...that we are too [attracted] to great deeds and display and that our ambition has reduced the greater reputation of our house more than ever. However, if you want to make his Beatudine understand that the serious good that others may condemn as prideful, is in very great error. That each of those who appraise us as arrogant and ambitious, if they would see that we exalt our house because it has made more stable and long-lasting our rule over Reggio and Modena above the other places in the Empire, under the title of duchy, that for others is vainglorious. Before this, the methods of rule of our house were very weak and fleeting in the Empire. The reason each city has been more readily governed is that we have sought to ascribe it to and impute it to display (*pompa*). We now have the governance of those places perfected and stabilized according to God and the world, where before we could say that our House held them almost without reason but through a mere continuation, as many others hold places with little sense of responsibility, nor do they

of splendor and display. Borso argues that he is not prideful when he exalts his lineage because its praise is well deserved. It is a lineage that in its Obizzian form reflected a strong corporate family identity. Moreover, Borso's reputation and that of his *casa* is linked to display and pomp which supports stability.

Borso argues that his pursuit of the title of duke of Ferrara, like that twenty years earlier when he received the imperial titles of duke of Modena and Reggio, are not based on ambition and arrogance but on the pursuit of good, Christian rule. Thus, the prestige of the house of Este, with all its antiquity, provides perfected and stabilized rule. The display to which Borso alludes is integral to a style of rule that is both worldly and religious. Thus, the special significance of the ducal title as simultaneously secular and spiritual by dint of its origin in the authority of the vicar of Christ. Borso's ambition and rightful pride is for the purpose that «we will be able to dispose of things in Ferrara and beyond with our freedom, and with many other good and worthy ways.» Contrary to Pardi's claim, stability in Borso's allegiance to Venice and the pope was at the heart of Estensi rule which the family «invented» (came upon) as they uncovered it over time. Once the Estensi ruled through mere continuation, (*continuazione*) but that has now been perfected. All the above techniques of rule, the antiquity of their house, the policy of peace, and most of all the importance of display have developed through a process of discernment that has been uncovered and perfected over time (*perfecte et perpetue secundo Idio et secundo il mundo*). I translate «ragione,» which Borso uses five times, as «rule,» especially as long-lasting rule and good governance, in light of the definition for «ragionamento» in the first edition of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, that associates «ragione» with «the understanding of good and the fleeing from evil, for from there it is called ragionamento or of reason discovered,» and so rule as found, uncovered, or come upon («trovamento»⁸⁷). The quest for the ducal titles was the logical culmination of this uncovering. This is *la politica della ragione ritrovamento*, the politics of finding or uncovering perfected

care to strengthen their rule as we have done, by means of a good and Catholic ruler and as we will want His Holiness to do for Ferrara, when once he wishes to do so.»

⁸⁷ «La ragione, ecc. è comprendimento del bene, e del male fuggimento, e indi è detto ragionamento, cioè della ragion trovamento,» *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, Venice Giovanni Alberti 1612, s.v. ragionamento, p. 679.

governance. It too reinforces stability, the stability of Estensi rule perfected over time.

Less than two months earlier Borso had written another letter to Trotti instructing him to urge the pope to move faster establishing the peace. «We wish, Giacomo, that you speak to His Holiness as our lord and on our part as a true and devoted son, and desirous of his honor and reputation, and that you tell him that we consider that our life is very brief . . . So, being at the end of our brief life we know to remind His Holiness that if he has the desire, perhaps, to make peace, doing something that is not only worthy and honorable and that will earn him reputation and glory, that now having presented the thought, he should act quickly.»⁸⁸ Peeling away the layers, is this just a prod for the pope to take action, and is it made in a strictly political context, or does it reveal a deep personal dedication to pope, church, and even, perhaps, some serious thought about one's own mortality? It is tempting to see in the passage a person aware of the spiritual dimensions of being a good and Catholic ruler, a man sensing that his time on earth is ending, another shadowy image of Borso's inner being. In his consolatory letter to Lorenzo de' Medici, Borso referred to «human fragility» (*l'umana fragilità*). In the end it is neither possible nor desirable to separate the public from the private, the political from the religious in Borso.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ «Nui, volemo, Iacomo, che tu parli cum la santità de nostro signore da nostra parte et come da suo vero et devote figliolo et desideroso de l'honore et dela reputation sua, et che tu li dica como nui consideramo che la vita nostro è molto breve. . . Cussi essendo il termino dela vita nostra breve saperessimo racordare ala sua santità se l'ha desiderio mo' che lo è facta la pace, de fare cossa niuna digna et honorevole et che li habia a dare reputatione et gloria, che hora l'havesse a metterli il pensiero et fare presto». Borso to Giacomo Trotti, 29-30 April 1468, in M. FOLIN, *Il palazzo Schifanoia...*, cit., p. 47.

⁸⁹ Borso's piety was well known. He never married and cultivated an image of continence, an unusual Estense trait. He invited the Carthusians to Ferrara and built the Certosa for them, where he was buried. Most of all Carlo da San Giorgio described Borso's personal piety: Upon rising from bed he immediately read «as a priest» the *Divine Office*, the Psalms, and other prayers. None other than Giuseppe Pardi asked if Borso was sincere, to which he answered yes, so it seems (Fu Borso sinceramente divoto? Sembra di si) and he concluded that Borso genuinely feared for the salvation of his soul. (Mirò sopra tutto alla salvezza dell'anima nel temuto al di là.) See A. CAPPELLI, *La congiura dei Pio Signore di Carpi contro duca Borso d'Este Marchese di Ferrara, duca di Modena e Reggio scritta nel 1469 da Carlo di San Giorgio bolognese*, «Atti e memorie della R.R. Deputazioni di storia patria per le provincie Modenesi e parmensi» II (1864), pp. 367-416, especially p. 386.

Less than two years later Pope Paul II had changed his mind about Borso's ambition and pride and announced to a consistory of cardinals his intent to raise Borso from papal vicar to duke of Ferrara. By the end of 1469 the pope had been won over. Angelo Acciaiuoli, Borso's ambassador, wrote that «His Beatitude separates you from the others in his love». (*«peroché la sua beatitudine ha la vostra excellentia apresso di sé separate dagli altri in dilectione»*.)⁹⁰ This was the product of both policy and personal diplomacy. Earlier in his letter to Trotti Borso explained that while others (read Milan, Florence, and Naples) attack the honor of the Apostolic See, Borso demonstrates that «we will show that we are as clear, sincere, and true lord as there has been in Italy for a hundred years, according to our rank, and above all the most devoted and obedient [lord] that the Holy Church has ever had, and [devoted] in particular to the present pontiff ».⁹¹ It was only when Paul came to understand the effectiveness of Borso's statecraft, placed at his disposal and perhaps explained to him by Trotti, that he agreed to raise him to ducal status. But it would be a mistake to ignore the role of the personal in the reversal of Paul's opinion. In the midst of the pontiff's disastrous attack on Rimini, Trotti reported that comforted by Borso's support, the pope and the cardinals have come to rely on his advice, who like a stealthy sparrow hawk (*sparavero*) has the ability the effect war and civil strife without sword and expense (*senza spada et senza spesa*).⁹² Indeed, it would be just as mistaken to separate policy from personality and that Borso's success rested as much on how he cultivated policy as the policy itself. This is *la politica di personalità*, the politics of personality and it revolves around a series of attributes Borso cultivated and projected such as *affabilità* (affability), *giocondità* (happiness) and *mansuetudo* (gentleness).⁹³ These and many other virtues explain the

⁹⁰ «Et veramente è degno pontifice, peroché ha molte conditioni abitate in sé che sono appartenenti ad la dignità sua. Et è debito d'ogni christiano amarlo et reverirlo; io so quanto la excellentia vostra l'ama et cognosco che quella ha gran ragione, peroché la sua beatitudine ha la vostra excellentia apresso di sé separate dagli altri in dilectione». Angelo Acciaiuoli to Borso d'Este, 20 December 1469. Quoted in G. ANTONIOLI, *'Bone parole, ma niuna provisione'...*, cit., p. 247

⁹¹ «... monstraressimo che siamo netto, sincero et reale signore tanto quanto fosse in Italia da cento anni in qua secundo il grado nostro, et sopra tuto il più affectionato et obediente che mai havesse sancta Giesa, et in specie al pontifice presente». Trotti to Borso, 29-30 April, 1468 in M. FOLIN, *Il palazzo Schifanoia...*, cit., p. 47.

⁹² Trotti to Borso, 24 August 1469 in A. CAPPELLI, *La congiura dei Pio...*, cit., pp. 396-97.

⁹³ R. TRISTANO, *'Lo amore deli subditi'...*, cit.

success of Borso's foreign policy as practiced, for example, in his personal mission to Venice in 1467.

Just a few weeks after Borso left Rome for home Paul wrote to Borso on hearing of his grave illness how much pain he felt in his heart because of his paternal love («*Quod animum Nostrum valde angebat, et propter eam paternam caritatem*»).⁹⁴ As the vicar of Christ on earth and mere human, Pietro Barbo had to manage the huge gap between his a public and private personas. While it is plausible that he viewed a fortified ducal Ferrara as a more effective bulwark against the designs of his native and powerful Venice, there is no reason to doubt that, as in Borso's letter to Lorenzo, he was expressing his deep personal affection for the man he once dismissed as ambitious and proud, now mortally ill. This seems to be at the heart of the difference between Paul's perception of Borso and that his predecessor. Pius II judged Borso to be morally false, unwilling to keep his word to support a crusade. This is ironic because Borso may have been more honest than most, as none of the other Italian princes demonstrated actual support for a crusade so much as lip service. On the other hand, Paul adjusted his judgment of Borso's character as he recognized the efficacy of Borso's *ragione*, his ability to maneuver in the treacherous world of Renaissance Italian politics. Pius dismissed Borso's reputation for magnificence and generosity as mere appearance; Paul seems to have understood that appearance was integral to successful rule. Maybe despite his own misgivings about his native Venice, he valued Borso as «a good son of that state», and not only of that realm but of the papal state as well. Borso was trustworthy.

These four politics were the foundational principles of Borso's foreign policy. They were also why he was successful, how he maintained the peace, avoided the perils of war, enhanced his prestige, and heightened his freedom to dispose of things. Returning to Conti's observation, Borso established a stable relationship of loyal subservience to Venice. He maintained it with great display as he personally visited the Polesine of Rovigo each year.⁹⁵ He did so as he

⁹⁴ E. GARDINER, *Dukes and Poets...*, cit., Appendix II, p. 539.

⁹⁵ «[Borso] . . . went every year to commend the same queen of Adria, now saying that he would do whatever the Senate wanted, now asking to better reveal the thing he always considered first in importance in his state up to when he died.» «. . . cui ogni anno andava a complimentare all'impensata sulla stessa regina dell'Adria, ora col dire che avrebbe fatto quanto voleva il Senato, ora pregando a meglio riflettere, tenne la cosa sempre nello

uncovered his ancestral glory and perfected its rule. Despite the relative weakness of Ferrara, Borso was an active, sometimes determinative personal participant in Quattrocento politics. This was something worthy of praise. Contemporary admiration for Borso's reputation, for his success was deep enough that it was preserved in historical memory.

More than one hundred and thirty years after his death, Orlando Pescetti in his *Proverbi Italiani: raccolti, e ridotti sotto a certi capi, e luoghi communi per ordine d'alfabeto* could still list at the head of the section titled «*Tempo passato, e costume passata*» the proverb, «*Non è più il tempo di Duca Borso.*»⁹⁶ This was a lament over the present, a glance back to a golden age, a memory, the product of Borso's affability, his popular touch, but most of all colored by the perception of his success, especially in contrast with his brother Ercole. This raises the question of why Borso was successful, or better still why he was perceived as such, a prince of peace, reconciler, arbiter, who preserved his realm in, as Pigna put it, a «happy time». Anglophone historians have long been drawn to Renaissance Florence and to the Medici. Florence was that great power, the dominant banking and mercantile society, the leader in studying and promoting a Latinate humanism. Ferrara was none of these things, a middling power, overwhelmingly landed even feudal, and the purveyor of a neo-feudal, chivalric literature, led by Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso. If Michelangelo's David symbolizes Florentine artistic culture, so does the miniaturist art of the *Bibbia di Borso* for Ferrara. Therein lies the profound difference between these two cultures that Borso's condolences to Lorenzo at least furtively transcends. Borso and his time has been lost to a large degree, his memory faded. This is too bad for without the wealth of Florence and Venice; the military strength of Milan; the prestige of royal Naples, and the spiritual authority of the popes, Borso d'Este practiced a uniquely successful politics in Quattrocento Italy: *tempo passato, costume passata*.

stato suo primiero, fino a che ei venne a morte.» SIGISMONDO DEI CONTI, *Le storie de' suoi tempi...cit.*, p.116.

⁹⁶ Venice Lucio Spineda 1603, p. 257. The other mention of Borso is «Il Duca Borso. Di coloro, che sfoggiano nel vestire,» Duke Borso, «Of those, who show off in dress». p. 199.