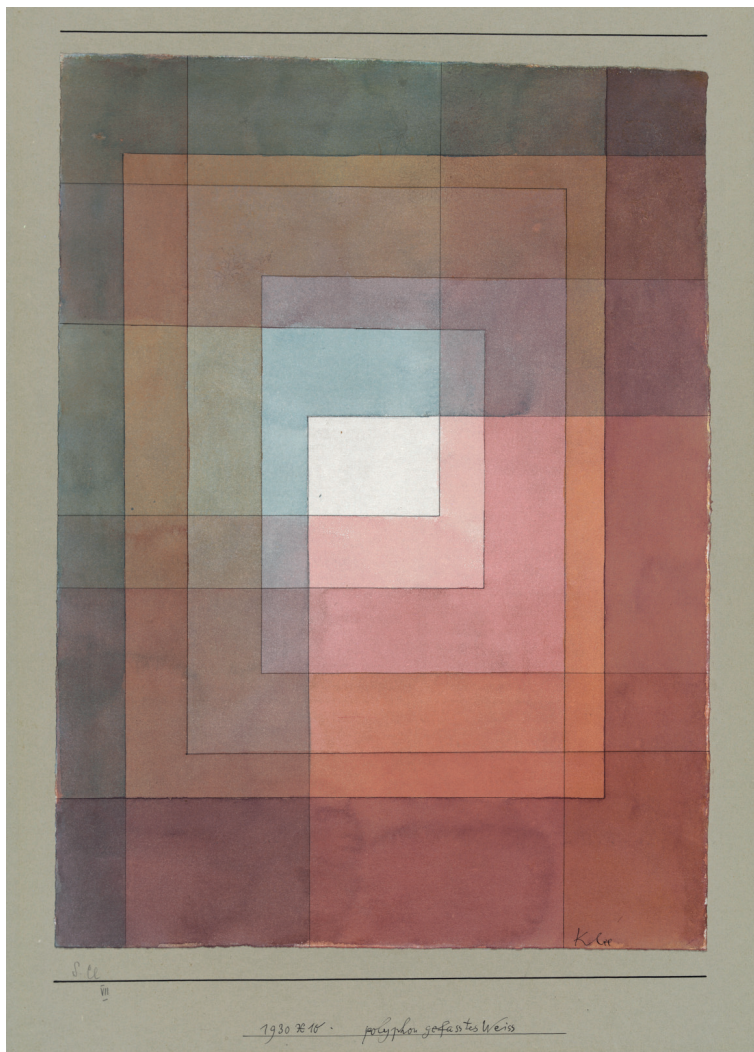


AVANT L'ÉTAT
Droit international
et pluralisme politico-juridique en Europe,
XIII^e-XVII^e siècle



dir.

Dante Fedele, Randall Lesaffer et Pierre Savy

Collana di Studi di Storia del diritto medievale e moderno

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Isabella Lazzarini

*A Spider's Web. Agreements, Pacts and Alliances
before, around and after the Peace of Lodi
(Northern Italy, 1454-1455)*

ABSTRACT: The peace of Lodi was a highly symbolic treaty, stipulated among the duchy of Milan and the republic of Venice in April 1454. In the summer of 1454, a first league between Milan, Venice and Florence was signed in Venice. Over the autumn and with the participation of Pope Niccolò V and of Alfonso V, king of Aragon, Valencia, Naples and Sicily, the league became «universal». The Italian League has famously been seen as «the» treaty at the origin of the western grand narrative of the balance of power and the birth of permanent resident embassies. Actually, it was a coalescing moment in a continuous and complementary stream of negotiations on many geographical and political levels. The peace and the leagues were prepared and paralleled by clusters of very local pacts, and were continuously adapted to the ever-changing political circumstances. The chapter aims at analysing this phenomenon by focusing on the case-study represented by the duchy of Milan. In this perspective, the «treaty» becomes a binding moment in a broader and almost uninterrupted process of peacemaking, and peacemaking itself can be read as a grammar for mediating, negotiating and solving conflicts among powers, polities, and agencies of different nature and status.

1. *The Peace of Lodi and the Italian League: an Ideal Case-Study*

On 20 March 1455, Francesco Sforza, duke of Milan, wrote to all his «*colligati et adherentes*» starting with the cities of Ancona, Bologna, and Lucca, the lords of Romagna (his brother Alessandro was the first), the doge of Genoa, the marquis of Mantua Ludovico Gonzaga and the duke of Modena and Reggio Borso d'Este, and to all the archbishops, bishops and officials of the duchy of Milan (and a handful of non-Milanese lords occupying Milanese lands, such as the da Correggio) a letter «*pro publicatione lige*», and announced the publication of a «*criida*» (an announcement to be publicly read on all the squares). In Milan, the papal bull announcing Nicolaus V's blessing of the league that was subscribed at Naples a few days earlier by King Alfonso V of Aragon, and that had been signed among the king, Milan, Florence, and Venice, had just arrived¹.

¹ The following abbreviations will be used throughout the chapter: ASMi = Archivio di Milano; AS = Archivio Sforzesco; PE = Potenze straniere; PS = Potenze sovrane; RD =

In its two versions, it is a short letter compared to the hundreds and hundreds of pages that such a result had required, but Sforza's wording deserves attention. The blessing of the pope – who played a central role in the whole story – was given for an agreement that was «*confirmata, ratificata et approvata per essa serenissima maestà [Alfonso] et le suprascripte tre potentie [the duchy of Milan, and the republics of Venice and Florence]*». Such league was the result of a laborious journey: it was approved, said the duke, in the forms and according to the ways it was concluded («*secondo che la fu conclusa*»), that is «*dicta pace ad Lode et liga a Venetia*». After the difficult inclusion of the king «*se constituisse la prelibata Sanctità [the pope] protettrice, defensatrice et conservatrice d'essa pace et liga ad honore de l'omnipotente Dio et de la sancta chiesa romana et per tranquillità et riposo de tucta Italia*». The duke's fatigue and relief are palpable, as is his awareness about the complicated nature of such a difficult agreement. The story of the league – as Sforza mentioned in his letter – was short in time (less than one year passed between the first peace and the announcement of the last version of the league) but inevitably very long in the making and tortuous in its last passages. The first agreement, a peace («*dicta pace ad Lode*») was stipulated among the duchy of Milan and the republic of Venice in Lodi on 9 April 1454. At the end of the summer, on 30 August 1454, the peace between the first two became a league between Milan, Venice and Florence, and was signed in Venice (the «*liga a Venetia*»). Over the autumn and winter, and with the participation of Alfonso V, king of Aragon, Valencia,

Registri Ducali; ASMn = Archivio di Stato di Mantova; AG = Archivio Gonzaga; BAMI = Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano. ASMi, AS, RD 42, cc. 481r-482r (ancient numeration); the *crida* (the public announcement in the vernacular) is at the cc. 482r-v. The two versions (the external and the internal one), are slightly different: the internal letter is shorter and has a more commanding tone, and it is interesting to note that the name of the chancellors on whose shoulders would fall the duty of writing to all those people was indicated in the page margins. The news about the ratification of the league was already in a letter sent on 2 March by the Milanese ambassadors in Rome, Bartolomeo Aicardi Visconti and Alberico Maletta, who wrote «*avisemo la vostra signoria como anchoy la santità de nostro signore ha fato publicare e bandire per questa città de Roma questa Liga, contrata tra la maiestà del re, la vostra signoria, la signoria de Venetia e Fiorenza; e como la sua santità ha aproavato, ratificato e intrato in questa liga: e qui se ne fa grande festa de campane, et hano aparigiato de fare questa sera de grandi falodii, e così è ordinato se facia per tuto lo territorio de la Ghiesia [...] E ha ordinato la sua santità che la vostra signoria e la signoria de Venetia e de Fiorenza debiano publicare questa liga a XXV dì del presente, como se contignerà in la bulla de la ratifficatione la qualle mandaramo domane o l'altro a la vostra signoria*», M. Briasco - D. Grieco (eds), *Carteggio degli oratori sforzeschi alla corte pontificia*, III, *Niccolò V (1 gennaio 1454-24 marzo 1455)*, Rome 2022, l. 349, p. 411-412.

Naples and Sicily, the league became indeed universal, was blessed by the pope, and announced by every other power on 25 March 1455, the day of the Annunciation. In one among many twists of fate in this story, the pope had died two days before².

The binomial composed by the peace of Lodi (1454) and the Italic League (1455) is a highly symbolic treaty. Orchestrated by a cluster of princes and powers in need of peace and legitimation, and included into the main collections of peace treaties since the 1730s, it has famously been seen as the origin of the western grand narrative of the balance of power and the birth of “modern diplomacy”³. Whatever the grand narrative, its distinctiveness in the landscape of late medieval Italian agreements is real: after many attempts, this was the first league to include in a single binding act the major polities of the peninsula (the «*partes principales*») together with the tight and sometimes overlapping networks of their respective allies («*colligati, recomandati et aderenti*»). Only a handful of polities were excluded from the agreement: two lords, Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta of Rimini and Astorre Manfredi of Faenza, both subjected to the pope, and the great harbour-city of Genoa, whose sovereign was the emperor, but whose autonomy was periodically limited by spontaneous devolutions to others such as the dukes of Milan or the kings of France⁴. However, it was a coalescing moment in a continuous and complementary stream of negotiations on many geographical and political levels. Like many other peace treaties, agreements, leagues and pacts, the more general agreement

² On these years and on Nicolaus V's role, see R. Fubini, *Politica e pensiero politico nell'Italia del Rinascimento. Dallo stato territoriale al Machiavelli*, Florence 2009, p. 77-106 and now, M. Chiabò - P. Farenga - A. Modigliani (eds), *Niccolò V: allegorie di un pontefice*, Rome 2023. The pope's role on the peacemaking process still needs more research: on a (partisan) view on Nicolaus V's efforts, see G. Manetti, *Vita di Niccolò V. Traduzione italiana, introduzione e commento*, ed. A. Modigliani, Rome 1990, p. 162-169.

³ On the “symbolic” value attributed to the peace, see R. Lesaffer, *Peace Treaties from Lodi to Westphalia*, in R. Lesaffer (ed.), *Peace Treaties and International Law in European History: From the Middle Ages to World War I*, Cambridge 2004, p. 9-44 and I. Lazzarini, *At the Roots of the History of Diplomacy: Writing, Preserving and Publishing a Peace Treaty (1454-1735)*, in I. Lazzarini - L. Piffanelli - D. Pirillo (eds), *Reframing Treaties in the Late Medieval and Early Modern West*, Oxford forthcoming.

⁴ On the peace and the league, still see G. Soranzo, *La lega italica (1454-1455)*, Milan 1924 and G. Pillinini, *Il sistema degli stati italiani (1454-1494)*, Venice 1970; more recently, see R. Fubini, *Italia quattrocentesca. Politica e diplomazia nell'età di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Milan 1994 and I. Lazzarini, *L'ordine delle scritture. Il linguaggio documentario del potere nell'Italia tardomedievale*, Rome 2021, p. 301-333.

was prepared and accompanied by clusters of pacts resolving dynastic or territorial conflicts, tying or renewing military *adherentiae*, or ensuring peace along contested borders. Each of those clusters was centred on a focal point and created a spider's web, fragile but broad; its threads reached, and overlapped with, many other webs and in the process they were all constantly adapting to the ever-changing local or supra-local political circumstances. In this perspective, the «treaty» becomes a binding moment in a broader and almost uninterrupted process of peacemaking, and peacemaking itself can be read as a grammar for mediating, negotiating and solving conflicts among powers, polities, and agencies of different nature and status⁵.

This chapter aims at analysing this phenomenon by investigating the case-study represented by the duchy of Milan, and by focusing on its preparations for the peace and the following league. I will take into account a distinctive group of chancery records produced and preserved in Sforza Milan: the whole process of getting to Lodi and beyond is recorded by four registers and a number of loose drafts and copies; the letters written by the Milanese agents in Rome in these years could be usefully added to those records. A careful analysis in particular of two among these sources, the volumes now classified as Registri Ducali 18 (RD 18) and Registri Ducali 42 (RD 42), allows us to dismantle the inner mechanisms of the building, maintaining and updating a general league, and to see the complex fabric of correlated and complementary records that went with it⁶.

2. *The Context*

Italy in the fifteenth century was composed of a mosaic of polities that varied greatly in size, form, and power. The more formal states included republics (Florence, Lucca, Siena, Genoa, Venice); principalities centred on episcopal and communal cities (such as the duchies of Milan and Ferrara and the marquisates of Mantua and Urbino), and others based on feudal or ecclesiastical lordships (such as the duchy of Savoy, the marquisate of

⁵ See now I. Lazzarini - L. Piffanelli - D. Pirillo (eds), *Reframing Treaties*, cit.

⁶ On the men, practices, and events of Milanese diplomacy in these crucial years, essential remain P. Margaroli, *Diplomazia e stati rinascimentali: le ambascerie sforzesche fino alla conclusione della Lega italica (1450-1455)*, Florence 1992, and F. Senatore, «Uno mundo de carta». *Forme e strutture della diplomazia sforzesca*, Naples 1998.

Monferrato, or the prince-bishops of Trent and Aquileia); finally the very peculiar papal monarchy, and the southern kingdoms. While the political independence and agency of all these powers was actually very broad, they were formally limited by the sovereign authority of the Empire in the centre-north and the Papacy in the centre-south of the peninsula. Politics was not only a matter for polities with a legally defined authority, however, but also for all those powers, communities, and individuals that controlled a fraction of political agency⁷.

In the final decades of the fourteenth and the first of the fifteenth century, a long sequence of wars between Milan, Venice, and Florence in the north, and between the Angevins and the Aragonese in the Kingdoms of Naples and Sicily, combined with the problematic control over Genoa, had prepared the ground for a general agreement that could stop the frantic spiralling of war. The return of the popes to Rome after the schisms provided the system of the Italian states with a leadership increasingly determined to settle conflicts with an all-inclusive treaty. The ground – complicated by the fall of Constantinople in Ottoman hands in 1453 – was prepared for the last conflict in the Po plain between Milan and Venice to end up in a peace potentially open to all the major and minor powers of Italy⁸.

3. *The Sources*

In the Milanese chancery the documentary sources directly linked to fifteenth-century peace treaties and agreements are represented by unbound records and registers. The first are a heterogeneous group of what look more like residual records than a homogeneous collection, and have been gathered without any order in few *buste* during the early twentieth-century reordering of the archives of the Sforza age⁹. More coherent and telling is

⁷ A. Gamberini - I. Lazzarini (eds), *The Italian Renaissance State*, Cambridge 2012.

⁸ On the overall dynamics of the period, see I. Lazzarini, *L'Italia degli Stati territoriali (XIII-XV secolo)*, Rome-Bari 2003; F. Somaini, *Geografie politiche italiane tra medioevo e Rinascimento*, Milan 2012. On the diplomatic side of the process, see I. Lazzarini, *Communication and Conflict. Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350-1520*, Oxford 2015.

⁹ ASMi, Trattati 1524-1526. On the complex story of the Milanese archives and their many reordering, see A.R. Natale (ed.), *Archivi e archivisti milanesi. Scritti*, Milan 1975 and F. Leverotti, *L'archivio dei Visconti signori di Milano*, in I. Lazzarini (ed.), *Scritture e*

a small number of chancery registers on paper and parchment, produced under the rule of the first three dukes of the house of Sforza (1450-1499). In particular, the Milanese agreements stipulated by Francesco Sforza in the 1450s have been transcribed in four registers: only one of them has been produced in the very years of the peace and the leagues¹⁰, while the other three were written afterwards¹¹. The original version of the agreement (in each of its three different steps: the peace and the two leagues), probably on parchment and with all the original subscriptions and signatures required to be effective, is nowhere to be found in Milan. To these records directly involved on the stipulation and registration of the agreements, the diplomatic correspondence exchanged between the duke and his agents should be added: letters and instructions, however, are for once less important¹².

A close survey of the documentary evidence is now necessary: RD 18 and RD 42, on which we will mostly focus, are two chancery registers produced in the same decades – and therefore share a common culture of writing – but they are actually two different kinds of records, and give to the attentive reader two different images of the whole peacemaking process.

Written on parchment by a handful of chancellors, but in a common, quite elegant chancery handwriting with some hints at the humanistic writing that would take over in a decade, RD 18 is what we could call a “classic” register of agreements, and collects treaties and pacts stipulated in the period spanning from the last Visconti (Filippo Maria, 1414-1447) to the first Sforza duke (Francesco, 1450-1466), with some complementary records. It is a huge register, composed by more than 400 sheets of parchment. The records are singled out – they do not follow one another without interruption in the page –, ordered quite regularly by subject (in a broader

potere. Pratiche documentarie e forme di governo nell'Italia tardomedievale (secoli XIV-XV), «Reti Medievali», IX (2008), <http://www.serena.unina.it/index.php/rm/article/view/urn%3Anbn%3Ait%3Aunina-3124>, last accessed 07.05.2024; on the Milanese chancery in the Sforza age, F. Senatore, «Uno mundo de carta», cit.

¹⁰ ASMi, RD 42 (1454-1458).

¹¹ They are ASMi, AS, RD 18, in parchment (1414-1467); RD 35, which is a copy of RD 18, also in parchment, and RD 39 (1434-1480), which was a special collection commissioned in 1467 by the first secretary, Cicco Simonetta for the new duke, Galeazzo Maria Sforza. The Registri ducali are online (<https://www.archiviodigitale.icar.beniculturali.it/it/185/ricerca/detail/662682>, last accessed 07.05.2024).

¹² Although we will take into account when useful at least the correspondence from Rome (mostly in ASMi, AS, PE, 41), now edited in M. Briasco - D. Grieco (eds), *Carteggio degli oratori sforzeschi alla corte pontificia*, cit. (who published also Sforza's letters or minutes copied in RD 25 and BAMI Z 219 sup.).

sense), and the *mise en page* is very neat. The groups of records linked to a single agreement or a series of agreements with the same interlocutors are copied in *quinternioni*, then bound together, and in between the files some or even several pages are quite often left blank. The process of copying is the result of a very attentive sequence of choosing the acts and composing the collection, well attested by internal notes and crossing references¹³. The ancient numeration of the sheets has been placed on the pages only when all the *quinternioni* were bound together¹⁴. As the acts approach 1450, the copied records multiply: apart from the practical need of keeping at hand documents useful for contemporary politics, all the registers made in the 1460s-1480s were also dealing with another distinctive issue. The ducal records of the Visconti period underwent massive losses after the death of Duke Filippo Maria, in 1447, and registers such as RD 18 are probably the result of a complex and systematic operation of recovery¹⁵.

¹³ For an example, at c. 193v, a note interrupts the space left empty in the middle of the sheet: «In hoc spacio poni deberet tenor per ordinem instrumentorum de quibus in penultima linea surpascripta fit mentio, sed quia ea instrumenta de verbo ad verbum prout iacent transcripta sunt et in quinterno proximo precedenti et in presenti etiam non ponuntur et si opus erit videre, recurratur ad folium tertium dicti precedentis quinterni» (it refers to acts stipulated in 1435).

¹⁴ The sheets still preserve, on the *recto*, the original page number; the register has also been provided in the twentieth century with two new series of page numbers (one with a *timbro a secco* – an embossing stamp – the other with a pencil) which differ slightly (because they take into account in a different way the white sheets at the opening of the register): for that reason, I will use the original one.

¹⁵ In 1447 a decree by the «Capitanei et defensores libertatis Mediolani», the leaders of the Repubblica Ambrosiana that ruled the city from 1447 to 1450, explicitly invited the Milanese citizens to destroy all the fiscal registers and records (the records «taxarum, talearum, focorum, buccarum, onerisque salis et aliorum quorumvis onerum») that they could find. The result actually was a much broader destruction and loss of political and administrative as well as fiscal registers and loose records. When Francesco Sforza took control of the city, in 1450, the effort of finding what was dispersed («molte et infinite scripture, libri et rasone esportate da la comunità di Milano [...] de grandissima importantia») was massive, and went on for years: Duke Francesco's officials searched everywhere and collected even the registers of *imbreviature* kept at home by the notaries (for the quotes and the story, see A.R. Natale, *Archivi milanesi del Trecento*, in «Acme», XXIX (1976), p. 263-285 and A.R. Natale (ed.), *Stilus Cancellariae: formulario visconteo sforzesco*, Milan 1977).

11 ^{mo} d. ducis M ^{ti} de noiatione colligato p ^{ti} d ⁿⁱ Venetiar ^{um} noie sp ^{us} d ⁿⁱ	fo	323
q ^o Junij 1459 at ^o	fo	323
Instrumentum denominationis colligato p ^{ti} d ⁿⁱ Junij 1459 at ^o	fo	323
L ^{re} ratificationis pacis M ^{cc} . Comitatus Venonie at ^o xijij Junij 1459	fo	324
Ad d. ducem M ^{ti} per dominos Senenses xiiij May 1459	fo	325
Responsum duale ad M ^{tas} lris 21 May 1459	fo	325
Prima Ratificatio pacis per Sec ^m d. Aragonum Regem at ^o	fo	325
Publicatio iste ratificationis facta Neapoli 13 May 1459 at ^o	fo	325
Scaprum circa factum pacis Sec ^m Regis Aragonum scilicet loco festim die 18 Junij 1459	fo	326
Instrumentum assignationis et p ^{ti} tationis l ^{re} rat ^o denoiat ^o colligato et adheret ^o d ⁿⁱ 1459 28 May	fo	326
Ad dominos Florentinos pro scda ratificatione h ^{er} at ^o 11 Junij 1459	fo	326
L ^{re} d. oratoribus in Venetijs 29 May 1459	fo	327
d. Nicolao Arcimbolo 17. 29 May 1459	fo	327
d. Spineto de campofecosio ultimo May 1459 at ^o	fo	327
d. oratoribus in Ven ^{etia} 19. 21 Junij at ^o	fo	327
L ^{re} p ^{ti} d ⁿⁱ Ven ^{etiarum} ad flectores pergoni d ⁿⁱ Johanni leono potan et Johi de caudepefaco	fo	328
capit ^o pro restit ^o p ^{ti} d ⁿⁱ	fo	328
11 ^{mo} d. domino Ven ^{etiarum} p ^{ti} d. ducem M ^{ti} at ^o	fo	328
L ^{re} conforti a ^g d ⁿⁱ G ^u st ^o phi de flusto p ^{ti} ratificat ^o pacis fien 27 Junij 1459 at ^o	fo	328
Georgio r ^o Carolo de carreto pro pace ratificat ^o q ^o Julij 1459 at ^o	fo	328
d. d. Liga confederato ^{rum} d ⁿⁱ 6 Julij 1459 at ^o	fo	328
Nobilibus de cochonate ex comitibus Eaduate p ^{ti} 6 Julij 1459	fo	329
Georgio de annoho locutionenti Alexandrie in facto ratificat ^o p ^{ti} de carreto 7 Julij 1459 at ^o	fo	329
d. Epo ^{scopo} communi et hominibus totius patrie Valesij 7 Julij 1459	fo	400
d. oratoribus in Ven ^{etia} de capitalis r ^o ceptis 11 Julij 1459	fo	400
d. oratoribus in Ven ^{etia} 19 Julij 1459 at ^o	fo	400
Item Eisdem 1 ^o Aug ^o	fo	400
Ad p ^{ti} d. ducem M ^{ti} per comunitatem Venonie 26 Julij at ^o	fo	400
Ad p ^{ti} d. ducem M ^{ti} per d. Sanctem 26 Julij 1459	fo	401
Ad d. Sanctem de Venetueoglyp ^o p ^{ti} d. ducem M ^{ti} 1 ^o Aug ^o 1459 at ^o	fo	401
Ad a ^g d. de liga confederato ^{rum} 2 ^o Aug ^o 1459 at ^o	fo	401
Ad Nobiles de cochonate 5 Aug ^o 1459	fo	402
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Ad petrum de medius 19 Aug ^o 1459 at ^o	fo	404
Ad a ^g hono ^{rum} ex comitibus terende at ^o	fo	404
d. oratoribus in Ven ^{etia} 23 Aug ^o 1459 at ^o	fo	405
Ad Saunclem de falets ex condominis muree 24 Aug ^o 1459	fo	405
Principale r ^o confederibus de Subiceij 24 Aug ^o 1459	fo	405
d. a. Alexandro de Alexandris oratori Florentino 25 Aug ^o 1459	fo	405

Image 2: Archivio di Stato di Milano, RD 18, Index 1

A second index coeval as well and written on a much smaller *quinternello* on paper has been added to the *liber* by retying it (probably later) to it¹⁶.

¹⁶ On inventories and lists, see in a comparative view A. Fossier - J. Petitjean - C. Revest (eds), *Écritures grises. Les instruments de travail des administrations (XII^e-XVII^e siècle)*, Rome-Paris 2019, and in particular I. Lazzarini, *L'ordine delle scritture*, cit., p. 241-254. It can be

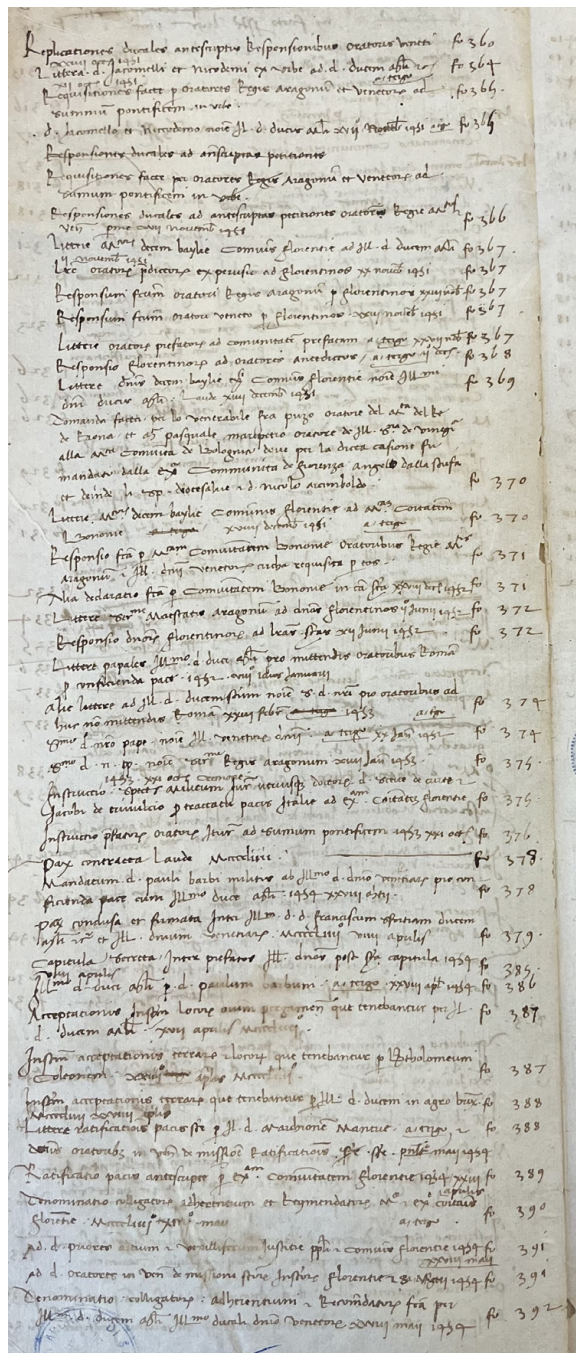


Image 3: Archivio di Stato di Milano, RD 18, Index 2

interesting that the copy of this register, RD 35, has only the list in the first sheets of the *liber*. What was RD 18's *quinternello* for? Maybe – but that is just a hypothesis – it was meant to remain separate from the register, maybe on a shelf or a box containing similar indexes for other registers.

RD 42 is a completely different register: it is the only *liber* made during – and not afterwards – the peacemaking process, and spans a much shorter period, the years from 1454 to 1458. Written on paper, it looks like a daily working instrument more than a later collection. It still is quite a neat *liber*, but the records are transcribed by many different hands, they often follow one another, and all the writing space is filled. No thematical or geographical distinction is applied, nor any chronological regularity is strictly observed. It has no coeval index whatsoever (and that is another sign of it being an open, current register, such as the *libri litterarum*). It is longer than RD 18 or 35: it starts at page 236r with the second half of a letter sent by the duke to an unknown recipient on 18 May 1454 followed, on the same day, by the mandate for Guarnerio Castiglioni and Nicolò Arcimboldi to be sent as ambassadors to Venice¹⁷. The text of the peace of Lodi was unfortunately recorded in the part now lost; the text of the league of 30 August 1454 was transcribed, while for the final league of 25 March 1455 we do not have here the text, but all the following ratifications were copied, together with many letters, in the surviving portion of the book¹⁸.

¹⁷ It has its original numeration up to c. 604; then a later (but still ancient) hand continues. In the twentieth century, as for the RD 18, two series of numbers are added, one with a stamp, the other with a pencil.

¹⁸ ASMi, RD 42, cc. 418r-424v (30 August 1454).

two different ways of – and purposes for – recording acts in register. RD 42 is an ordinary and open chancery register, meant to be filled while the texts were composed and probably entirely bound since the beginning. RD 18 (like RD 35 and RD 39) is rather a register-collection (a “cartulary”): an unknown number of records spanning 52 years has been combed and some of them have been selected and transcribed in a given moment after 1466, neatly filling several *quinternioni* that have been bound together when the selection was over. The two registers therefore give the reader – back then and now – a very different kind of information even if the copied records are the same²⁰.

4. *The Spider's Web: Old and New Networks, Old and New Agreements*

It is more than time then to look at the records and at both the political and the juridical frame of the agreements. Sticking to the initial metaphor of a spider's web, the two registers reveal two different kinds of networks, and many active spiders.

The first network emerges from RD 18: the “cartulary” reveals the long-lasting and stratified web of alliances, leagues and agreements that bound together – or put one against the other – for decades the major and minor actors in the many regional and supra-regional playfields before a general league would aim at regulating the relationships between them all on a peninsular scale. RD 18 recorded quite a number of more or less relevant peace-treaties, agreements and wedding pacts stipulated by the dukes of Milan both with their greatest antagonists – Venice, Florence, the counts, then dukes of Savoy – and the many minor lords, seigneurial kinships, urban communities surrounding the duchy of Milan (such as the cities of Genoa or Savona, and the Fieschi, Doria, dal Carretto aristocratic kinships on the Ligurian coast). After the naval battle of Ponza (1435), the agreements began to include the king of Sicily and pretender to the crown of Naples, Alfonso V of Aragon, suddenly overturning the enmity between the duke and the king into a previously unimaginable – and

²⁰ O. Guyotjeannin - L. Morelle - M. Parisse (eds), *Les cartulaires*, Paris 1993; A.J. Kosto - A. Wintroth (eds), *Chartes, Cartularies and Archives. The Preservation and Transmission of Documents in the Medieval West*, Toronto 2002; O. Guyotjeannin (ed.), *L'art médiévale du registre. Chancelleries royales et princières*, Paris 2018.

disturbing – alliance²¹. The first secret agreement signed after Ponza laid the foundations of the other leagues and peace-treaties between Naples and Milan recorded in the register. Among them, the agreement between the Repubblica Ambrosiana and the king in 1449, but also the separate agreements between the king and Florence, and the king and Venice (both signed in 1450, a few months after Francesco Sforza became duke of Milan), were recorded probably because of their role in tying the links that would prepare the ground for the general league in 1455²².

The years between 1414 and 1454 therefore witnessed dozens of different agreements on a local and supra-local basis; they go in circles and are sometimes at odds, sometimes complementary to each other. Many fronts were simultaneously important for Milan: from west to east, Savoy, Savoy-Acaia, Monferrato, Saluzzo (and the network of the lords surrounding the marquises and the dukes); Genoa and the Ligurian coast – and the galaxy of the powerful Genoese kinships (such as Fieschi, Malaspina, d’Oria); the Apennines between Milan and Florence; the tight fabric of cities and lords in the Po plain with the Este domains, the Malatesta, and the troubled Romagna region, which had been disputed among Venice, Florence and Rome for a long time; and the western border: Mantua, and obviously Venice and the Venetian Terraferma, with its roads to Germany and the Empire. On top of the close circle of the interests and ambitions of the dukes of Milan, a broadly peninsular framework enters into play as soon as those interests increasingly cross other polities’ path, such as the kingdom of Naples, for instance, for the control of Genoa or along the southern borders of Tuscany. In such a mosaic, it is *per se* surprising to find a lack of visible hierarchy among the agreements: the peace treaties with Venice and Florence or with Alfonso of Aragon are recorded with the same degree of exactitude and detail than the *compromissa* with the Fieschi, the Malatesta, the da Correggio²³.

²¹ ASMi, RD 18, cc. 180r and following (8 Oct. 1435): the league was ratified again in 1442 (c. 193r). On the antecedents and consequences of the battle of Ponza, see F. Somaini, *Filippo Maria e la svolta del 1435*, in F. Cengarle - M.N. Covini (eds), *Il ducato di Filippo Maria Visconti, 1412-1447*, Florence 2015, p. 107-166.

²² ASMi, RD 18, cc. 218r and following (the Ambrosian Republic and Alfonso, 25 March 1449); cc. 278r and following (Florence and the king, 21 June 1450); cc. 288r and following (Venice and the king, 2 July 1450).

²³ For the political conflicts and alliances of the Visconti age, see L. Piffanelli, *Politica e diplomazia nell’Italia del primo Rinascimento. Per uno studio della guerra «contra et adversus ducem Mediolani»*, Rome 2020; for the years 1450-1455, P. Margaroli, *Diplomazia*

RD 18 collects the agreements that were negotiated, approved and implemented between two, three, or more actors. Such texts can take different forms: they are defined as «*capitula, conventiones, pacta*» and they concern truce, peace, league (sometimes also princely weddings); they finalise new borders (and therefore we have the «*recognitiones super facto confinium*») or exchanges of territories and unions through marriage agreements; they bind the contracting parties to seek compensation and maintain peace, and to be ready to intervene in case of rupture of allegiance. The register not only collects their final version but also the intermediate stages that prelude to the stipulation of the agreement (*compromissa, promissiones*). We find here, therefore, very different records: notarial deeds in Latin, subscribed by chancellors that sign as «*imperialis dignitatis notarius*» by putting their *signum tabellionum* at the beginning of their subscription; the *ratificationes* by the main actors involved in the treaty preceded by the lists of «*colligati, recomandati et adherentes*» (on those we will come back later); the tentative *capitula* to be discussed in the vernacular. Finally, from the late 1440s, we find here also some diplomatic letters or memoirs and instructions to the Milanese ambassadors, and to all the agents that acted as mediators in the process. The current practices and uses are many: the 1453 *capitula pacis* between Alfonso of Aragon and Venice were sent to Milan by Borso d'Este, duke of Ferrara, who acted as «*arbitrator inter partes suprascripte*»²⁴. In order to reconstruct past obligations, the Milanese chancery recurred to every information available. Somewhere in 1453, in order better to understand the implications of the 1453 league between Alfonso and Venice, information was collected from Giacomo Trivulzio about the *capitula* of the peace stipulated between King Alfonso and the Repubblica Ambrosiana in 1449. Trivulzio's testimony is copied on the register as it was given: «*quanto me posso retrare a memoria delli capitoli facti per mano del camerlengo nomine della comunita de Milano con lo Re de Ragona è questo substantialmente: primo lo Re prometteva [...]*»²⁵.

e stati rinascimentali, cit.

²⁴ ASMi, RD 18, cc. 289r and following, 1453, July, 2. The role of high-profile arbiters in political agreements between the end of the fourteenth and the mid-fifteenth century should be analysed with more attention: Jenny Benham has worked on this topic for an earlier period, J. Benham, *International Law in Europe, 700-1200*, Manchester 2022.

²⁵ ASMi, RD 18, cc. 291r: Trivulzio remembered that the negotiation took place in the kingdom of Naples «*uno giorno de Sancta Maria de marzo in Trayeto presso Gayeta*»; again, we see here the huge work required to recover crucial information from the troubled years from 1447 and 1450.

If a broad web of supra-regional, regional, and local agreements, contacts, and pacts emerges from RD 18, RD 42 puts under a magnifying lens a handful of crucial tiny wheels that make the machine of great politics turn: the daily work of those who made the decision-making process possible, together with the voice of the many local actors involved on the Milanese side. RD 42 is the working register which keeps track of all negotiations from the years 1454-1457 regarding the stipulation, ratification, and implementation of the three steps that took Milan and Venice, and then Florence and Naples, to move from a peace between two parties to a general league among all the Italian powers. The register contains the texts of the agreements, but also a wealth of different records, among which two in particular are very interesting from our point of view. In fact, the Milanese chancellors recorded all the letters sent and received about the negotiations and the diplomatic instructions given to the Milanese ambassadors and agents, together with the long and careful lists of Francesco Sforza's (and some of the other *maggiori potentie*) *recomandati*, *colligati et adherentes* and their *ratificationes*. These last ones are quite a formulaic and common kind of notarial deed: however, even though the skeleton of the record is formulaic, they are hardly all the same. First of all, the names – *colligati*, *adherentes*, *recomandati* – are not equivalent: they record different types of obligations (*colligati* were often the allies highest in status; the *adherentia* was a sort of military obligation, the *recomandati* were more loose friends who enjoy some protection)²⁶. Moreover, the obligations are the result of a previous, often long and always distinctive relationship with the lords and dukes of Milan. In their variety, they attest to the broad and flexible combination of duty and freedom that such forms of allegiance could allow. Behind every *collegantia*, *adherentia*, *recomendatio* lied a different story: the notarial documentary form with which all of the kinships,

²⁶ On these forms of allegiance, see the classic G. Soranzo, *Collegati, raccomandati, aderenti negli Stati italiani dei secoli XIV e XV*, in «Archivio storico italiano», XCIX (1941), p. 3-35 and now D. Fedele, *The Medieval Foundations of International Law. Baldus de Ubaldis (1327-1400), Doctrine and Practice of the Ius Gentium*, Leiden-Boston 2021, p. 424-430; on their content and meaning in the fifteenth century territorial dynamics, see now F. Bozzi, *Figli devoti e amici fedeli. Il ruolo delle accomandigie nelle relazioni interstatali fiorentine (metà XIV-inizio XV secolo)*, in «Studi storici», LXI (2020), p. 108-173 (for Florence) and Id., *Le spire della vipera. Le aderenze viscontee fra Tre e Quattrocento*, Milan 2021 (for Visconti Milan); see also L. Piffanelli, *Nelle parti di Romagna. The Role and Influence of the Apennine Lords in Italian Renaissance Politics*, in N.S. Baker - B.J. Maxson (eds), *Florence in the Early Modern World. New Perspectives*, Abingdon-New York 2019, p. 117-141 (for Romagna).

the men, the women (a handful of ladies mostly signed on behalf of their heirs), according to the nature of their allegiance, ratified their consent to the agreement was bended to include or exclude formulas and sentences declaring obligations and duties. Moreover, not all of the *ratificatores* involved agreed with the Milanese chancery on their position: in this sense, the fact that the ducal archives were dispersed and destroyed after Filippo Maria Visconti's death created a void that left plenty of room for re-defining the respective roles in the Milanese geopolitics. One example could show the practical complexity of each situation. Carlo Cacherani, lord of Rocca d'Arazzo (in the Asti region), in April 1454 was recorded among the *adherentes* of Francesco Sforza; in the two following treaties he disappeared from the lists because in the Milanese chancery someone discovered that in 1445 he had agreed to recognise Rocca d'Arazzo as a fief from Filippo Maria. Having the chancery realised that Cacherani was a vassal and not an adherent, his name was dropped²⁷. A man, a woman, a kinship, a community could also be linked to more than one major power, and that – once discovered – would generate confusion and amendments. RD 42 innumerable times records lists of Milanese *colligati, adherentes et recomendati*, and the level of detail is sometimes startling. As soon as we enter a more local level, a whole world of lesser actors behind the scene emerges, and their different needs and expectations are revealed. Many legally binding instruments were needed to ensure that the duke of Milan would find himself in the best position to negotiate the peace and the following general league. Both the registers – from a different angle – show that many negotiations were kept simultaneously open – with all their many passages and the cor-

²⁷ I warmly thank here Francesco Somaini, who gave me the information on Cacherani: about his investiture on Rocca d'Arazzo, see F. Cengarle, *Feudi e feudatari del duca Filippo Maria Visconti. Repertorio*, Milan 2007, p. 514-515, doc. 393 (Milan, 28 Jan. 1445). On the feudal networks of the age of Filippo Maria Visconti, see F. Cengarle, *Immagine di potere e prassi di governo. La politica feudale di Filippo Maria Visconti*, Rome 2006. The loss of the Visconti archives had a big impact to the documentary memory of Sforza's new regime; however, the loose dossiers of the *adherentiae* were at risk of being lost even in quieter times. On 25 September 1468 Cristoforo del Conte asked to the ducal chancellor Giovanni da Vailate to send Cicco Simonetta «l'istrumento de l'adherencia de misser Franceschino dal Carretto» that remained in a cabinet in the Castle in Milan, together with that of his sons and other papers. Evidently, bundles of records relating to the networks of allegiance that substantiated the alliances that would eventually be recognised in the general agreements were preserved in the chancery on tables, in chests and in cabinets and their survival was hazardous, ASMi, PS, 1606: Cristoforo del Conte to Giovanni da Vailate, Pavia, 15 January 1468.

responding records – from bottom to top and vice-versa.

The local complexities and intricacies of the interests at stake are revealed also by the extremely detailed instructions sent by Sforza to his ambassadors in Rome in early January 1454. While the Milanese and the Venetians were still fighting along the borders, and fake and real news were going back and forth between the Po plain and the curia, Pope Nicolaus V once again opened peace talks in Rome, asking every power involved to send ambassadors to Rome²⁸. Sceva de Curte and Giacomo Trivulzio were immediately sent to the Roman curia (together with Zaccaria Saggi, the Mantuan ambassador). Nicodemo Tranchedini da Pontremoli, Sforza's chancellor and trusted man, joined them after a short stay in Florence where he had the opportunity to discuss about the peace with Cosimo de' Medici. Tranchedini carried with him a detailed memoir («*memoria*») supplemented by secret oral instructions²⁹. Anyway, even before Nicodemo's arrival in Rome, the duke explained in several long letters (partly in clear, partly in cypher) to his ambassadors the many territorial issues that the negotiations would have to consider. It is worth taking a moment to dwell on the details revealed by this correspondence³⁰. In the duke's letters the whole contested border between Milan and Venice along the cities of Cremona, Milan, Brescia and Bergamo and the territory between the Adda and Oglio rivers were mentioned town by town, castle by castle, valley by valley. These settlements had passed from one power to the other several times during the so-called Milanese-Venetian wars in the 1420s-1440s, and the layers of conflicting interests, jurisdictions and loyalties were deeply embedded in the region. Then the duke's attention turned towards the

²⁸ C. Canetta, *Il congresso di Roma nel 1454*, in «Archivio Storico Lombardo», IX (1882), p. 129-135.

²⁹ See their biographies in F. Leverotti, *Diplomazia e governo dello Stato. I famigli caval-canti' di Francesco Sforza (1450-1466)*, Pisa 1992, *ad vocem*; the details of their missions can be found in P. Margaroli, *Diplomazia e stati rinascimentali*, cit.

³⁰ M. Briasco - D. Grieco (eds), *Carteggio degli oratori sforzeschi alla corte pontificia*, cit., ll. 27-32, p. 34-54 (all sent to de Curte and Trivulzio on 13 of January from Marcara); l. 38, p. 61-62 (19 January, Acquanegra); l. 39-40, p. 62-66 (20 January, Marcara); l. 47, p. 72-73 (22 January, Marcara); l. 49, p. 74-75 (24 January, Marcara). The lengthy instruction to Nicodemo Tranchedini is dated 24 of January, from Marcara: l. 48, p. 73-79 (the duke informed the same day his ambassadors that «mandiamo là Nicodemo cum le limitacione et memorial de le cose se hanno includere in li capitula della pace per parte nostra et informato ad pieno et ad bocha perché gli havemo dicto et imposto molte cose ad bocha che non mandaressimo in scripto, como quello che sappeti è ad nui fidatissimo», l. 52, p. 84, 24 January, Marcara).

lands of the marquises of Mantua, who in the same decades had lost to the Venetian Peschiera, Lonato, Asola, and Castiglione delle Stiviere, and towards the Milanese region occupied during the war by the duke of Savoy (the territories around Pavia, Novara, and Alexandria). As for Monferrato, the marquises were at that moment outside the negotiation because the duke had already reached a separate agreement with them. The issue on the lands occupied by the lords da Correggio, particularly the town of Brescello on the Po river, brought the interests of the cities and lords of Emilia to the negotiating table: Parma, Mantua, Borso d'Este, the lady Luchina dal Verme, Erasmo Trivulzio, Cristoforo Torelli, and several others. The ambassadors should also keep in mind «*el facto del signore Sigismondo [Malatesta]*» and Bologna, whose territory interested not only Venice but also Florence and the lords of Carpi. They had to take care that Tiberto Brandolini and Franchino Castiglioni were restored to their respective possessions: and the list goes on and on³¹. The situation on the terrain was so complicated that Sceva de Curte decided to draw a tentative map of the Oglio border to explain to the cardinals his duke's reasons. Only once they saw the geography of the region, he wrote, the various cardinals agreed that Venice should accept Milan's conditions («*lo qual non intendevano se non mo che havimo facto el disegno de Lombardia suso una carta*»)³². Cicco Simonetta, Francesco Sforza's most important secretary, a few days later sent to the ambassadors «*le scripture de le confine de Valle Sancto Martino per le quale se dichiara como l'è ducato de Milano*» and warned de Curte and Trivulzio to take great care of all the «*scripture ve ho mandate circa el facto de la pace*», and at the end of their embassy to bring them back to Milan «*perché non ne ho altra copia*»³³.

Going down to a local scale, and combining letters and the local agreements and pacts, we are in a better position now to understand what Machiavelli exactly meant in his *Istorie fiorentine*. In telling the story of the

³¹ I quote here from M. Briasio - D. Grieco (eds), *Carteggio degli oratori sforzeschi alla corte pontificia*, cit., l. 29, p. 42-48: Francesco Sforza to Sceva de Curte and Iacomello Trivuzio, Milan, 13 January 1454.

³² *Ibid.*, l. 59, p. 92-93, Sceva de Curte and Giacomo Trivulzio to Francesco Sforza, Rome, 30 January 1454.

³³ *Ibid.*, l. 86#, p. 127, Cicco Simonetta to Sceva de Curte and Giacomo Trivulzio, Milan, 11 February 1454. On Cicco Simonetta role in the Milanese chancery and his personal obsession with controlling and preserving records, see M. Simonetta, *Rinascimento segreto. Il mondo del segretario da Petrarca a Machiavelli*, Milan 2004, and now M.N. Covini, *Potere, ricchezza e distinzione a Milano nel Quattrocento. Nuove ricerche su Cicco Simonetta*, Milan 2018.

war and the peace, the Florentine recalls that in the aftermath of Francesco Sforza's ascent to the duchy of Milan in 1450, and after a first couple of cautious years, Venice decided that it was worth trying to move war to him in order to take advantage of his early and possibly weak hold on power. The war went on for two years, involving many others – not last René of Anjou, the defeated Angevin pretender to the Neapolitan crown that the Aragonese King Alfonso the Magnanimous took for himself in 1442. When the Angevin pretender decided to leave Italy for good, in the fall 1453, Machiavelli says, everyone – Duke Francesco, the Venetians, the Florentines, and King Alfonso – was exhausted, and Pope Nicolaus V longed for peace because in that very same year the Ottoman Sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror had put an end to the millenary history of the Byzantine Empire by conquering its capital, Constantinople. Therefore, in early 1454, everyone was eager for a general peace. So, «*il Papa per tanto pregò i potentati italiani gli mandassero oratori, con autorità di fermare una universale pace. I quali tutti ubbidirono*»³⁴. Once in Rome, nevertheless, things proved to be more complicated than expected: the respective territorial and dynastic pretensions were so entangled that «*pareva che queste difficoltà fossero a risolvere impossibile*». However, Machiavelli continues, «*quello che a Roma fra molti pareva difficile a fare, a Milano e a Vinegia infra duoi fu facilissimo: perché, mentre che le pratiche a Roma della pace si tenevano, il Duca e i Viniziani a dì 9 di aprile, nel 1454, la concludono*» by defining their respective borders and territories³⁵.

And that is what we see from Milan: we can imagine that in Venice things were as complicated. In lesser *potenze* such as Mantua, the volume of negotiation was obviously smaller, but equally stratified. Across the general agreement between Milan and Venice, to which he did take part only as a *colligato* of Francesco Sforza, Ludovico Gonzaga was negotiating his own *capitula secreta* with Milan to take any possible advantage from the incom-

³⁴ N. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, in A. Montevicchi - C. Varotti - G.M. Anselmi (eds), *Edizione Nazionale delle opere di Niccolò Machiavelli*, sez. II, *Opere storiche*, vv. 1-2, Rome 2010, VI.32.

³⁵ On territories and borders in the conflict between Milan and Venice, see now L. Zenobi, *Borders and the Politics of Space in Late Medieval Italy: Milan, Venice and their Territories*, Oxford 2023, in particular p. 98-180; on the process of territory-making and its role in defining medieval authority and sovereignty, see Id., *Beyond the State: Community and Territory-Making in Late Medieval Italy*, in M. Damen - K. Overlaet (eds), *Constructing and Representing Territory in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Amsterdam 2022, p. 53-80.

ing peace, and to protect his territory. He was acting not only «*pro civitate et terris suis*», but also for the smaller domain of his brother Alessandro, who recognised him as his superior, and the territory once controlled by the other surviving brother, the troublesome Carlo. In the meanwhile, the marquis was negotiating with the smaller lords of the Po plain – Pio, Pico, da Correggio, Torelli, Rossi, Pallavicino – that had outstanding territorial claims against him (and with Francesco Sforza or Borso d'Este, such the da Correggio). Needless to say, each step taken by Milan – Mantua's «*pars principalis*» – and concerning the Gonzaga had to be ratified by the marquis, who, not by chance, kept his own trusted ambassador, the Pisan Zaccaria Saggi, in Rome³⁶.

5. Conclusion

By putting a single agreement into context, peacemaking becomes an almost uninterrupted negotiating stream quite different from a collection of single, highly formalised events. Agreements were manifold, were made on many territorial and political levels, and were framed by legal instruments that derived not from an established legal framework, but from the notarial practice or from some «private» *consuetudines*, such as the arbitration of a third person (or more). Each of them had to be negotiated, recorded, ratified, and made public; each of them produced a considerable amount of different written records before, during and immediately after their writing – records whose preservation's rules and strategies are not necessarily clear to us – and was a step in a process that moved at a different pace, and therefore required continuous adaptation³⁷.

³⁶ I. Lazzarini, *Fra un principe e altri stati. Rapporti di potere e relazioni di servizio a Mantova nell'età di Ludovico Gonzaga*, Rome 1996: for the Mantuan records (ASMn, AG, 44 [loose records] and 85.13 [a register], see also Ead., *L'ordine delle scritture*, cit., p. 309, 311-312.

³⁷ I. Lazzarini - L. Piffanelli - D. Pirillo (eds), *Reframing Treaties*, cit. Such a critical reconsideration of peace treaties is under way at once for the Middle Ages and for the Early Modern Age as a facet of the recent holistic re-thinking about the notions of state-building, diplomacy, and international law in pre-Modern Europe. Research on these topics are innumerable: for a very first survey, see J.M. Moeglin - S. Péquignot, *Diplomatie et «relations internationales» au Moyen Âge (IX^e-XV^e siècle)*, Paris 2017 and D. Fedele, *Naissance de la diplomatie moderne (XIII^e-XVII^e siècles). L'ambassadeur au croisement du droit, de l'éthique et de la politique*, Baden-Baden-Zürick/St. Gallen 2017 (for diploma-

By having a closer look to the quantity of records related to what we are used to think as a single, important treaty (or even three in a row, like in this case), we discover on the contrary the much more complicated, multi-layered and processual nature of peacemaking. As Machiavelli, again, said in the *Istorie*, around 1470 «*vivevasi per tanto in Italia assai quietamente, e la maggior cura di quelli principi era di osservare l'uno l'altro, e con parentadi, nuove amicizie e leghe, l'uno dell'altro assicurarsi*»³⁸. One can almost see the many webs of uninterrupted negotiation that kept all this together, and the famous advice given by Galeazzo Maria Sforza in 1475 to Charles the Bold of Burgundy – to act like the Italians who «*quando hanno una controversia con tre, se sforzano de fare con l'uno pace, et con l'altro tregua, et con l'altro guerra, acciò che più facilmente possano attendere alle altre cose et adimpire li soi disigni*» – becomes clear³⁹.

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cy); A. Orford - F. Hoffmann (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Theory of International Law*, Oxford 2016, R. Lesaffer, *International Law and Diplomacy*, in G. Martel (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Diplomacy*, Hoboken 2018, p. 1-14, and J. Benham, *International Law in Europe, 700-1200*, cit. (for international law), and G. Chittolini - A. Mohlo - P. Schiera (eds), *Origini dello stato. Processi di formazione statale in Italia fra Medioevo ed Età Moderna*, Bologna 1994, J. Watts, *The Making of Politics. Europe 1300-1500*, Cambridge 2009, and W. Blockmans - A. Holestein - J. Mathieu (eds), *Empowering Interactions. Political Cultures and the Emergence of the State in Europe, 1300-1900*, Aldershot 2009 (for the state-building process, its nature and limits).

³⁸ N. Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, cit., VII.23.

³⁹ Galeazzo Maria Sforza to Giovan Pietro Panigarola, Villanova, 12 Apr. 1475, in E. Sestan (ed.), *Carteggi diplomatici fra Milano sforzesca e la Borgogna*, Rome 1985, I, l. 460.