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# **Relations, Money, and Financial Skills to Fight an Attrition War. The Strozzi Brothers, Bankers and Commanders<sup>1</sup>**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The essay examines the contribution provided by Piero, Roberto and Leone Strozzi – sons of the wealthy Florentine banker Filippo Strozzi – to the French war effort in the last two decades of the Italian Wars. A contribution based on their military and diplomatic skills and on the availability of money, but also on their banking know-how and on consolidated relationships with a widespread network of financiers. These tools were essential in a war of attrition – such as the one waged by the Valois against the Habsburgs for the hegemony in Europe and in the Mediterranean –, because they allowed the three anti-Medici Florentine exiles to quickly transfer financial resources to the Italian fronts, overcoming the physical distance that separated the king of France's armies in the Peninsula and his fleets in the Mediterranean.

## **The strategy of the Valois after 1530**

The most recent historiography about the Italian Wars has recognized the resilience of French influence in the Peninsula after the peace of Bologna, despite the Habsburg victories of the 1520s.<sup>2</sup> Certainly, the emperor Charles V and his ministers had proved ca-

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations: AGS, Archivo General de Simancas; ASFi, Archivio di Stato di Firenze; ASMo, Archivio di Stato di Modena; BNF, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

<sup>2</sup> Garnier (2008); Heers (2009); Le Gall (2015); Pellegrini (2015); Pellegrini (2017); Rabà (2016); Giannini (2017); D'Amico-Fournel (2018); Shaw-Mallett (2019).

pable of building solid coalitions of interests in the kingdoms of Sicily and Naples and in the State of Milan. Furthermore, the fall of Rome (1527) and of the Republic of Florence (1530), abandoned by the Valois, and the peace of Cambrai had spread deep scepticism in Italy about the trustworthiness of the king of France as an ally.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, not all the major players in the peninsular theatre were satisfied with the balance of powers shaped by the Bologna talks.<sup>4</sup>

Since the victory of Pavia, the still fragile Habsburg hegemony had been a source of great concern for the Republic of Venice and also for the pope, who substantially disagreed with the emperor both about the reform of the Church and the attitude towards the Lutherans. Furthermore, at the beginning of the 1530s the French court was filled with political exiles from Naples, Florence, Milan and Genoa.<sup>5</sup>

In Florence, Charles V took the side of the Medici, placed at the top of a hereditary autocracy, by virtue of an agreement with Pope Clement VII. Unfortunately, the first duke, Alexander, was unable to gain the support of many of those middle-class gentlemen who derived their livelihood from trading or from serving the State in the public offices of the *Signoria*.<sup>6</sup> These gentlemen had been the main protagonists of the last republican experience and were endowed with a refined political culture and a strong inclination for direct action: led and financed by the patriciate at the opposition – such as the Strozzi, feared by the Medici for their power – these Florentine gentlemen constituted a politically, economically and even militarily significant force, fatally drawn into the French sphere of influence.<sup>7</sup> In the Republic of Siena, the struggle between the factions

<sup>3</sup> Ribier (1666), vol. I, p. 51; von Albertini (1970), pp. 112, 118, 120, 160, 167, 219; Diaz (1976), pp. 29–30.

<sup>4</sup> Knecht (2001), p. 209; Hamon (2003), p. 126.

<sup>5</sup> Gilbert (1970), pp. 206–207; Knecht (1984), p. 30; Picot (1995); Dubost (1997); Potter (2008), pp. 208, 209, 215; Bonora (2014).

<sup>6</sup> Gilbert (1970), pp. 23, 141, 148, 152; von Albertini (1970), p. 35; Diaz (1976), pp. 61, 67, 71; Machiavelli (2018), p. 2813.

<sup>7</sup> von Albertini (1970), pp. 27, 119–140, 204–205; Diaz (1976), pp. 24–25.

opened up dangerous spaces for the diplomatic intervention of the Valois. Even in the Republic of Lucca – where the Medici autocracy enjoyed a formal recognition but certainly not a widespread fondness – some more or less prominent citizens cooperated with the French ministers in Italy.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, both François I of Valois and his son and successor Henri II placed the recovery of their Italian domains among their priorities,<sup>9</sup> as parts of the dynastic inheritance and for reasons of prestige, but also for practical reasons. One of the clauses of the Concordat of Bologna – stipulated by Pope Leo X with François I in 1516 – transferred to the sovereign the right to present to pope his loyal servants to be appointed as bishops and abbots of his kingdom. A prerogative firmly and lengthily maintained by the local clergy would have given the sovereign patronage immense resources to attract the feudal nobility and patriciates, French and foreign, to the service of the monarchy. Resources that the Valois could not give up, but were bound to a privilege that had to be renewed by each new pope and in favour of each new king of France, through exhausting negotiations. Negotiations that the Valois could handle from a position of strength only by maintaining a vast sphere of influence in the Peninsula.<sup>10</sup>

To restore their prestige in the Italian theatre, the Valois faced the struggle against the Habsburgs as a war of relations. The most powerful among the Italian anti-Habsburg exiles – as well as the noble French subjects well connected in the Peninsula – were elected as mediators between the throne and Italian societies. The favour accorded by the king to these prominent exiles, their prestige at home and the French military initiatives would have persuaded the still in the shadow opponents to Habsburg hegemony about the

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<sup>8</sup> Ribier (1666), vol. II, pp. 88, 114; Berengo (1965), pp. 14, 221-225, 343-344.

<sup>9</sup> Romier (1913), p. 507; Contamine (1972), p. 233; Knecht (1984), pp. 31, 45; Potter (1995), pp. 257-260, 264; Knecht (2001), pp. 238-239; Haan (2010), pp. 23-35, 105-124.

<sup>10</sup> Ribier (1666), vol. II, pp. 6-8, 183-184; Du Gabre (1903), p. 127; Knecht (1984), pp. 2-4, 33; Heers (2009), p. 177; Le Gall (2015), pp. 309-313; Caldarella Allaire (2018); Tallon (2018), p. 307.

strong willingness of the Valois to intervene directly in the Peninsula, and above all their readiness to show the royal favour to their supporters in Italy.<sup>11</sup>

From a strategic point of view, François I and Henri II interpreted the global dispute in Europe and in the Mediterranean as an attrition war.<sup>12</sup> In such a war, the Kingdom of France would take advantage of its geographical compactness and, therefore, of the possibility of transferring human and material resources from one front to another more quickly and at a lower cost. The Habsburgs, on the contrary, could defend their domains – geographically separated by the sea and by the Kingdom of France – only by maintaining large and costly standing armies in any of them, in order to face even just potential threats, increasing the tax burden and, therefore, multiplying discontent and opposition among their subjects.<sup>13</sup> Besides, by opening other fronts in the Italian Peninsula, the Valois hoped to keep military operations away from France, maintaining a high internal consensus.<sup>14</sup>

In April 1536 the French army invaded the States of the Duke of Savoy and detached large garrisons in Turin, Pinerolo and in the Val di Susa, threatening both the State of Milan and the Republic of Genoa, an ally of Charles V. As a result, over the next two decades, the defence expenditure of the State of Milan tripled.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, the French ministers in Italy tried to multiply the fronts in the Peninsula and therefore the Habsburg territories' exposure to possible attacks, creating pro-French enclaves in central and northern Italy, supplied from Piedmont and from the sea.<sup>16</sup> Thirdly, through the alliance with the Ottoman thalassocracy and the setting-up of a mighty Mediterranean fleet, the Valois managed to keep the military pressure even on the Habsburgs' Mediterranean dominions.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the king of

<sup>11</sup> Potter (1995), pp. 266-267; Knecht (2001), pp. 51, 207-209; Potter (2008), p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> Hamon (1994), cap. I, secc. 65, 93.

<sup>13</sup> Du Gabre (1903), pp. 53-54, 72; Romier (1913), pp. 143, 488.

<sup>14</sup> Knecht (2001), p. 233.

<sup>15</sup> Rabà (2012).

<sup>16</sup> Hamon (1994), cap. I, sec. 64; Alonge (2019a), p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> Gaeta (1967a), p. 238.

France pursued all possible diplomatic avenues to attract Rome and Venice into an anti-Habsburg alliance.<sup>18</sup>

In this essay we will examine the contribution provided by the sons of Filippo Strozzi – considered by many as the richest Italian of his time –,<sup>19</sup> Piero, Roberto and Leone, to the French war effort. The three brothers were in fact the heirs of the Florentine political culture and they were convinced that the combination of energy, ingenuity and time – wearing out the powerful tools of the enemy, which were money and the number of deployed soldiers – was the key weapon to win any war.<sup>20</sup> Bankers, soldiers and admirals, the Strozzi could gather both human and financial resources to the king's advantage and exhaust those of the enemy. The distinctive feature of their contribution was certainly the recourse to their patrimony, but also their excellent know-how in all the functions useful for victory in an attrition war.

### **The attrition war by land**

The quality of the Strozzi's contribution to the French war effort was already evident in the period 1535-1537, when Filippo, in spite of himself, openly sided against Duke Alessandro Medici, first, and then against Charles V, resorting to the king of France in order to balance the Medici's power. In June 1535, François I of Valois, worried about the risks and expenses, specified his conditions: he would have marched towards Tuscany with his troops only to rescue three enclaves already acquired by the republican exiles: Florence, Livorno and Pisa.<sup>21</sup>

The following year the Strozzi contributed to adding value to

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<sup>18</sup> Alberi (1853), pp. 263-264; Alberi (1839), pp. 441, 444-446.

<sup>19</sup> Segni (1857), p. 371; von Albertini (1970), p. 221; Picot (1995), pp. 43-44; Simonetta (2019a).

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert (1970), pp. 37-38, 43, 114-115; von Albertini (1970), pp. 57-58.

<sup>21</sup> BNF, *Département des manuscrits, Clairambault 335*, f. 25r; Ribier (1666), vol. I, pp. 45-48; Gaeta (1960), pp. 89-90; von Albertini (1970), pp. 168-169, 207; Simonetta (2018), pp. 127-129.

another enclave, located in Emilia, Mirandola, the fiefdom of Count Galeotto Pico, a rebel against imperial authority. In the summer of 1536 Filippo Strozzi paid the king a considerable sum in Venice (between 15,000 and 50,000 *ducats*) to enlist troops in Mirandola under the command of the Genoese exile Cesare Fregoso.<sup>22</sup> Mirandola's position – a threat to all of northern Italy – and the quality of the commander brought the imperial admiral Andrea Doria to withdraw his fleet from simultaneous operations in Provence, in order to defend Genoa. The contingent of the Fregoso – in which Piero Strozzi also militated – instead moved towards Piedmont, where it freed Turin, sieged by an imperial army.<sup>23</sup>

On the Tuscan front, the cautions of François and the indecision of Filippo led to the Montemurlo rout on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1537 and to the capture of the great banker, who died in prison the following year. But in February already, his son Piero had moved to Bologna, protected by the anti-Medici attitudes of Pope Paul III, and had tried several sudden attacks against the Florentine dominion. Despite their failure, these attacks were such to arouse the concerns of the imperial authorities in Milan and above all those of the new Duke Cosimo Medici, exerting the same pressure on the latter's finances that in the recent past had caused many regime crises in Florence. A still recent and unstable leadership had to increase defence spending, and therefore to impose new taxes on its subjects to defend itself from a threat, even in this case, only potential.<sup>24</sup>

The Strozzi could quickly enlist infantry companies, taking advantage of their money, their charisma on the other republican exiles,

<sup>22</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1312, docc. 30, 76-79, 81-82, 143-146, 157; ASFi, *Mediceo del Principato*, Filza 333, ff. 225r-225v; du Bellay (1569), pp. 218, 244; Albizzi (1866), p. 518; Simoncelli (2006), p. 152.

<sup>23</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1181, docc. 2-3, 5, 110, 111; Chabod (1971), p. 52; Garnier (2008), pp. 118-119; Rabà (2016), p. 47.

<sup>24</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1189, docc. 1, 6; Ribier (1666), vol. I, p. 68; Adriani (1822), vol. I, pp. 63-64, 252-253, 301-302; vol. II, p. 81; Serristori (1853), p. 117; Gilbert (1970), pp. 58-59, 199; von Albertini (1970), pp. 39-40; Diaz (1976), pp. 57, 70, 80; Dall'Aglia (2014), sec. 14; Simoncelli (2006), pp. 252, 256, 265, 272, 287-289; Simoncelli (2016), pp. 38, 51-52, 59-62, 63-68, 86-87.

but also of the friend and client network they had created in Emilia, thanks to the mediation of their compatriot and fellow exile Bartolomeo Valori, former holder of government posts in the area on behalf of the Medici popes.<sup>25</sup> Besides, the entire Medici State poorly tolerated the political subordination to Florence and each city or village was torn apart by the internal struggle between local factions: an army of exiles could have leveraged such contrasts to acquire a new “Mirandola” in Tuscany or even to determine a general crisis in the Florentine dominion.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, until the end of the Italian Wars, the Strozzi could count on an unspecified but certainly imposing number of sleeping agents – openly encouraged by the Strozzi to remain in the shadow – within the borders of the Florentine State. Many of them were relatives of people faithful to the Strozzi who had openly chosen the path of exile. Many of these sleeping agents would have actively supported the attack by the Franco-Sienese army led by Piero against the Medici State in the summer of ‘54, opening the gates of their fortified villages and providing supplies and provisions.<sup>27</sup>

Since the operations of the 1530s, the pillars of the Strozzi’s contribution to the attrition war were, therefore, their financial means, their banking know-how, their position of charismatic leaders of the Florentine republicans, their networks in strategic areas – which included noble lineages such as the Fregoso, the Fieschi, the Pico, the Martinengo, the Anguillara, the Orsini, the Farnese and the Carafa – and the role of mediators between all these individuals and groups, on the one hand, and the king of France and the pope, on the other.

<sup>25</sup> Adriani (1822), vol. I, pp. 57, 85; Picot (1995), pp. 112-114.

<sup>26</sup> Gilbert (1970), p. 47; von Albertini (1970), pp. 275, 282-283, 296, 299, 302, 321-322, 327; Diaz (1976), pp. 17, 30, 45, 72, 82; Simoncelli (2016), pp. 74-75.

<sup>27</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie I, Filza 95, ff. 330r-339v, 342r, 343r-344r; Serie III, Filza 96, ff. 67v-68r; Filza 135, *Ristretto di notizie de fatti e vita di Piero Strozzi anno per anno di mano di Carlo di Tommaso Strozzi*, f. 401r; Serie V, Filza 1212, Bernardo Canigiani to Piero Strozzi, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1555; Filza 1213, Battista Alamanni and Piero Capponi to Piero Strozzi, 18<sup>th</sup> November 1556; *Mediceo del Principato*, Filza 365, f. 10r; Cini (1611), pp. 413-414; Adriani (1822), vol. I, p. 293; vol. II, pp. 5, 231-234; Romier (1913), p. 167; Diaz (1976), pp. 32, 108-109; Simoncelli (2018), p. 125.



Ultimately the influence of the Strozzi family depended on maintaining the Tuscan front among the priorities of the French global strategy<sup>28</sup>, in the first place by leveraging the availability of financial resources: Roberto Strozzi – certainly “key” to the French treasury, as Pietro Aretino defined him – lent money to the king mainly as contributions to the operations involving Piero and Leone as commanders. Such an attitude can explain why “à Lyon, la banque Strozzi, qui était considérée comme la principale des banques politiques, à laquelle on attribue une influence occulte sur la conduite des affaires italiennes, ne participa qu’accidentellement aux opérations de crédit.”<sup>29</sup> But this game was undoubtedly also played on the field of relations, horizontal and vertical. Starting with the Duke Alessandro’s killer, Lorenzino de’ Medici – to whom Piero and Roberto were linked through their marriage with his sisters Laudomia and Maddalena –, the Strozzi family managed to include most of the Florentine republicans in their patronage network, and therefore in the pro-French party. They also created a large entourage of supporters from Siena and Lucca. They became mediators between the throne and the high-ranked personalities, obtaining ecclesiastical benefices and positions at court for them. They also provided means of subsistence to middle-class republican exiles, involving them in their financial activities, enlisting them in their armies and fleets, and providing them with royal pensions.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Serristori (1853), pp. 123-124.

<sup>29</sup> Doucet (1933), p. 486; Simonetta (2018), pp. 179.

<sup>30</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 51, ff. 138v-139r, 153v, 181v, 226v-227r; Filza 135, *Ristretto di notizie*, ff. 400r, 402v, 404v, 412r, 420r; Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, doc. 216; c. 12, doc. 75; Filza 1212, Andrea Rinieri to Piero Strozzi, 5<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> February 1555; Piero Strozzi to Roberto Strozzi, 13<sup>th</sup> January 1555; Benedetto Samminiati to Piero Strozzi, 16<sup>th</sup> January and 19<sup>th</sup> March 1556; The *Capitano del popolo* and the *Deputati alla difesa di Siena* to Piero Strozzi, 5<sup>th</sup> June 1555; Marco Landucci to Piero Strozzi, 13<sup>th</sup> January 1556; Filza 1213, Francesco del Bene to Piero Strozzi, 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1556; Ribier (1666), vol. II, p. 114; Adriani (1822), vol. I, p. 267; vol. IV, pp. 139, 154; Serristori (1853), p. 121; Alberi (1853), pp. 318-319; Weiss (1960); Fasano Guarini (1960); Cantagalli (1962), pp. 247, 250-251; Gilbert (1970), pp. 94, 132; von Albertini (1970), pp. 6, 142, 256-257; Luzzati (1972); Diaz (1976), pp. 64, 108-109; Pardi (1977); Feldman (1995), p. 27; Simoncelli (2016), p. 116; Dall’Aglia (2014), sec. 24; Simoncelli (2018), p. 134; Alonge (2019c).

Certainly, the competition among the strategic priorities mimicked the one among the court factions: in this respect, Piero's leading role in court life wasn't less important than the protection of queen Caterina de' Medici, cousin of the four brothers and very close to their mother Clarice and their father Filippo, who in his capacity of papal banker had paid 130,000 *ducati* for Caterina's dowry in 1533. In fact, at the French court the Florentine general was mostly known – and was later remembered – as a refined collector of books and arms, and as a womanizer with a passion for goliardic feats.<sup>31</sup> But, equally relevant were the symbolic aspects. In July 1544 Roberto Strozzi presented the court with the offer by the famous Michelangelo – who declared himself “servant” of the Florentine banker – that he would erect a statue of François I if he had restored the republic in Florence.<sup>32</sup>

Nonetheless, Piero and his brothers, above all, had to propose to the king credible plans of attack against the Medici, and commit to carrying them out, anticipating cash and mobilizing their connections inside the Florentine State and on its borders.

At the end of 1541 Piero Strozzi planned an attack against Tuscany from Mirandola, from the sea – thanks to the intervention of the Ottoman fleet and of four other galleys under the command of Leone – and from the Duchy of Urbino. The Florentine general personally negotiated in the name of the king with Duke Guidobaldo della Rovere, but no deal was made. Strozzi therefore undertook himself to search for an alternative attack base, stipulating a private agreement with a feudal lord of the Rimini countryside, Carlo Malatesta da Sogliano, to whom he proposed a pension of 4,000 *livres* per year and a *condotta* of 2,000 infantry and 200 horsemen, both paid by the king. Strozzi promised to obtain the ratification of the agree-

<sup>31</sup> BNF, *Département des manuscrits, Clairambault 346*, ff. 190r, 192r; Adriani (1822), vol. I, p. 56; Bourdeille Brantôme (1822), pp. 432-450; Cantagalli (1962), pp. 234-235; Skalweit (1979); Bullard (2008), pp. 152, 154-155, 158-160, 165, 166, 169; Potter (1995), p. 273; Simonetta (2018), pp. 174-177, 201-202, 245, 252-253; Crouzet (2018), pp. 358-359.

<sup>32</sup> Simoncelli (2016), pp. 104, 114-115; Simonetta (2018), pp. 270-271.

ment from François I and, in case of refusal, to pay Malatesta the pension and the *condotta* for three years at his own expenses.<sup>33</sup>

One of the reasons for the successes achieved by the Strozzi in the 1540s and 1550s was undoubtedly their financial autonomy. In May and August 1544 and later in June 1551, Piero and his brother Roberto mobilized their contacts in Emilia as well as the Florentine exiles, advanced large sums and resorted also to the credit provided by their financial partners in Venice and in Rome, in order to assemble reliable infantry: well-paid and ready troops, therefore, to quickly reach the selected targets without disbanding in search of plunder.<sup>34</sup> The first expedition of '44 penetrated deep into the State of Milan up to Cremona but was overwhelmed by the Imperials in the battle of Serravalle Scrivia. The second managed to reach Piedmont through the Liguria Apennines gaining access to the imperial stronghold of Alba. The two raids led by Strozzi in June '51 through the Bolognese countryside were decisive in supporting the resistance of the king of France's ally, Ottavio Farnese, besieged in Parma by a joint imperial and papal army: the Florentine general's move forced pope Julius III to defend his Emilian subjects, withdrawing his forces from Parma to deploy them in an expensive and unsuccessful attack against Mirandola.<sup>35</sup>

As regards the two expeditions of '44, the sources describe Piero Strozzi's contribution to the French global strategy as the result of an imposing organizational and financial effort, in which the role of the king's financier is associated with that of the general of his troops. Unlike his colleague in command, Piermaria Rossi Count of San Secondo, the Florentine leader began his enlistments in April, without waiting for the money promised by François I: the total cost was 58,500 *livres* for 7,685 infantries, plus other 31,500 *livres* paid to

<sup>33</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1189, doc. 6; ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie I, Filza 95, f. 363r; Adriani (1822), vol. I, pp. 256, 260, 266, 293.

<sup>34</sup> Hamon (1994), cap. I, sec. 58.

<sup>35</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1190, doc. 7; ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 12, doc. 62; Rabà (2014); Simonetta (2018), pp. 233-235.

the count of Mirandola for the recruitment of his companies. These expenses were financed through the funds of the Strozzi's Roman bank and the loans granted to Piero's brother, Roberto, by other bankers from the Eternal City and from Venice.<sup>36</sup> In May, the first monthly salary of the infantry cost 22,500 *livres*, in addition to a further payment of 2,700 *livres* to enlist the light horsemen and to pay the first two-month wages. These sums were recorded by the Strozzi's as being lent to His Majesty at an annual interest rate of 16%, therefore the typical rate in the loan agreements stipulated by the bankers with the Pope and with the king of France.<sup>37</sup> In July, immediately after the defeat suffered at Serravalle Scrivia, the inexhaustible Florentine general gathered another 5,845 infantrymen in Mirandola,<sup>38</sup> distributing them a month's pay, for a total cost of 44,840 *livres*.<sup>39</sup> In the same period, Piero advanced three-monthly salaries to the 2,000 soldiers posted in Piedmont under his command (41,838 *livres*) and paid 9,000 *livres* to Swiss infantry, close to mutiny.<sup>40</sup>

Most of the sum put down by Piero for the first recruitment (36,000 *scudi*) had already been repaid in April 1545, at the request of Roberto. Moreover, the pope and the Duchess of Este paid a considerable part of the sums spent for the second recruitment.<sup>41</sup>

Evidently, the strategic value of the Mirandola enclave also depended on the possibility of quickly injecting abundant financial resources in order to enlist troops and above all to fortify and garrison the town. Throughout the 1540s the Strozzi's advanced large sums to supply the fortress, sometimes at the request of the French am-

<sup>36</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1191, docc. 17, 26; ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 97, ff. 6r-6v; *Mediceo del Principato*, Filza 365, ff. 72r-72v; Adriani (1822), vol. II, p. 81; Albizzi (1866), p. 538.

<sup>37</sup> Doucet 1933, pp. 481, 487-488; Bullard (2008), pp. 115-117; Hamon (1994), cap. III, secc. 27-28; Guidi Bruscoli (2000), pp. 24-25; Tognetti (2013), p. 63; Matringe (2016), p. 223.

<sup>38</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1318, doc. 25; ASFi, *Mediceo del Principato*, Filza 365a, f. 578v.

<sup>39</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 12, doc. 60.

<sup>40</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 12, doc. 55; AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1191, docc. 16, 35, 39; Hamon (1994), cap. I, sec. 54.

bassador in Venice, sometimes meeting the pressing requests of Lord of Mirandola himself.<sup>42</sup> In the same period, the Florentine bankers were also asked to substantially contribute to the needs of the French army of Piedmont.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, the banking know-how and the money of the Strozzi remedied the financial difficulties of the king of France, engaged in a global conflict, and therefore often forced to give priority to other fronts.<sup>44</sup>

Even the war for Siena saw the Strozzi protagonists of the French initiative, basically aimed at exhausting the Habsburgs' and Medici's finances. In April 1553, Roberto offered himself as guarantor and negotiator in a loan agreement for 400,000 *scudi* with the Duke of Ferrara, in order to finance the French war effort in Tuscany.<sup>45</sup>

A few months later king Henri II removed Ippolito d'Este, Cardinal of Ferrara, from the lieutenancy of Siena – who had rebelled against the imperial troops the year before – and sent Piero Strozzi in his place. The appointment of the Florentine and the French commitment in Tuscany were even supported by the Grand Constable Anne de Montmorency, Henri II's councillor most hostile to Italian military adventures.<sup>46</sup> Promoting Strozzi to the lieutenancy, Henri publicly declared his commitment to the restoration of the Republic in Florence, thus obtaining the financial contribution of the Florentine bankers in Lyon and Rome, for the most part, hostile to the Medici autocracy.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the arrival of Strozzi in Siena at the

<sup>41</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 12, doc. 150; Simoncelli (2016), pp. 107-113; Simonetta (2018), pp. 167-168.

<sup>42</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, docc. 77, 103, 121, 123, 124, 133, 145, 202; c. 11, doc. 49; Pellicier (1899), vol. I, pp. 360-361, 403; vol. II, pp. 575-576; Simonetta (2018), p. 180.

<sup>43</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, Guillaume Du Bellay to Piero Strozzi, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1542.

<sup>44</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, doc. 173; Doucet (1933), pp. 476-477; Baudouin-Matuszek-Ouvarov (1991), p. 260.

<sup>45</sup> Simoncelli (2018), pp. 76-79.

<sup>46</sup> Ganier (1957), pp. 58-60; Knecht (1984), pp. 28-29; Alonge (2019a), pp. 6, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Adriani (1822), vol. IV, p. 97; Hamon (1994), cap. III, sec. 17; Hamon (1999), cap. I,

head of an army of Florentine republican exiles induced Duke Cosimo Medici – one of the emperor's richest allies and financial supporter of the Habsburg defence of Lombardy and Piedmont – to make a strong effort to destroy his most bitter enemy. The duke had to raise the tax burden on Florentine subjects and drain the ducal treasure.<sup>48</sup> France was therefore able to open a new front at a reduced cost, also capable of diverting substantial imperial forces from the Flemish and Piedmontese theatres, easing the pressure on the troubled finances of the Kingdom. Finally, a French base in Siena – and later in Montalcino – became a very useful instrument of pressure on the Holy See.<sup>49</sup>

### The involvement in naval warfare

A powerful French fleet was intended by François I not only as a tool to force the emperor to deploy men and spend money in the Mediterranean theatre.<sup>50</sup> In 1540, the king entrusted two galleys of the Marseille fleet to a sailor trained by admiral Andrea Doria – and captain of Malta's fleet – Leone Strozzi, who hastened to build two more ships at his own expense.<sup>51</sup> With the succession of Henri II, the ambitious Florentine obtained lieutenancy over the French and Italian ports controlled by Valois and the command of the Atlantic and

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sec. 201; Picot (1995), pp. 6-7; Knecht (2001), p. 151; Ferretti (2003); Lang (2013), secc. 14-21; Simoncelli (2018), pp. 66-68, 77, 96-97, 120, 133-134, 180.

<sup>48</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1212, Ascanio Bertini to Piero Strozzi, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1555; ASMo, *Casa e Stato*, c. 390, *Capitolatione pertinente alla causa clusina mandata al Signor Cornelio Bentivoglio per haverne il suo certificato*; Serristori (1853), pp. 328-329; Du Gabre (1903), pp. 90, 105; Lanssac (1904), pp. 313, 427; Romier (1913), p. 425; von Albertini (1970), pp. 144-145, 164, 172-174; Cantagalli (1962), pp. 479-482; Simonetta (2018), pp. 250, 253.

<sup>49</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 51, ff. 64r, 90v, 136v, 138r, 169v-170r, 186v-187r, 188v-189r, 198r, 199v, 201r-201v; Filza 135, *Ristretto di notizie*, f. 401r; Du Gabre (1903), pp. 55, 125, 147-149, 312, 314; Romier (1913), pp. 489-491; Cantagalli (1962), pp. 226, 384, 390-391, 405.

<sup>50</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1459, doc. 7; Mafrici (2003), p. 644; Alonge (2019a), pp. 159-160.

<sup>51</sup> Romier (1913), p. 161; Garnier (2008), pp. 131-132.

Mediterranean fleets.<sup>52</sup> Like Piero's appointment to the Siena army's command, Valois's decision was also a clear message for his potential Italian allies: by entrusting the command of the most important Mediterranean projection of his military power to an irreducible enemy of the Habsburgs and the Medici – among other things connected, as a knight of Saint John, to another considerable naval power of Mediterranean Christianity –, the king of France showed his firm intention to continue the struggle for hegemony on the Peninsula. In the *Instruction* for Leone and for the Royal Governor of Provence dated August 15<sup>th</sup> 1548, Henri II specifically ordered his ministers to make use of their friend and client networks to gain new supporters to the French cause among the Italian nobles, using the power of the royal Mediterranean fleet as an argument to persuade the reluctant ones.<sup>53</sup>

François I spent at least 2,000,000 *livres* on his galleys in '42 -'44 alone. In 1548 Henri II planned to increase his Marseille fleet to 30-40 vessels, despite the shortage of funds. Leone too, therefore, had to resort to the money of the Strozzi to build the ships. He also had to mobilize a widespread network of friend and supporters in the Tyrrhenian ports, in order to recruit crews of selected volunteers from abroad – trained by Leone himself, and therefore more reliable than the Provençal conscript oarsmen – and to provide adequate weapons, and those water and food supplies that were indispensable for rowing warships. Thanks to his agents scattered throughout the western Mediterranean – including the Iberian Peninsula and the African coast – Leone was also able to obtain information about the movements of the Habsburg fleets and the enemy fortresses and garrisons. Finally, Leone promoted the gentlemen loyal to his family to the rank of captain. Among them, he chose the most skilled navigators as well as those with money and connections in the ports of

<sup>52</sup> Garnier (2008), p. 256.

<sup>53</sup> BNF, *Département des manuscrits*, Français 3118, *Instruction au Sr de Contay*, ff. 1v, 2r, 3r-3v; Giovio (1560), p. 726; Adriani (1822), vol. II, p. 365; vol. IV, p. 98; de La Roncière (1905), pp. 635, 645; Simoncelli (2016), p. 39.

the Tyrrhenian Sea, and therefore capable of handling the ships and crews entrusted to them at their own expense: many were Republican exiles, such as Baccio Martelli, or Pandolfo Strozzi, a relative both of Leone and of the powerful banker Bindo Altoviti, and brother of another banker, Leonardo, highly appreciated in Lyon.<sup>54</sup>

The results were not long in coming: in 1548 Marseille naval squadron and the private fleet of the Strozzi could count on about twenty galleys; in '54 the two fleets deployed over 35 vessels. At the end of the 1540s, the French fleet's raids had made the Tyrrhenian Sea very dangerous for unescorted Habsburg transport ships. In August 1551 admiral Andrea Doria himself, surprised by Strozzi off the coast of Toulon, preferred to avoid the clash with a withdrawal; a few days later the Strozzi's fleet even managed to enter the port of Barcelona, capturing enemy galleys and commercial ships. In September 1552, Cardinal Ippolito d'Este could rightly emphasize the decisive contribution of the Mediterranean fleet to the French strategy of attrition.<sup>55</sup>

Nevertheless, the alliance with the Ottoman empire and the intervention of its fleet remained essential to counterbalance the Habsburg forces in the Mediterranean:<sup>56</sup> an alliance that proved problematic, because the two powers often pursued divergent political and military objectives. Besides, during the large joint Franco-Turkish operations – the siege of Nice (1543), the War of Siena and

<sup>54</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 96, ff. 26v, 27v-28r, 36v, 38r, 46v-47r, 53r-53v, 54r, 65r-65v, 73v, 74v-75v; Serie V, Filza 1212, Baccio Martelli to Piero Strozzi, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1555; Pandolfo Strozzi to Piero Strozzi, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1555; Giovanni Moretti da Nizza to Piero Strozzi, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1556; BNF, *Département des manuscrits, Français 3118, Instruction au Sr de Contay*, f. 1r; Ribier (1666), vol. II, p. 109; Litta (1870), tav. XI; Romier (1913), p. 162; Hamon (1994), cap. I, secc. 67, 72; Knecht (1998), pp. 341-342, 503; Gemignani (2008); Garnier (2008), pp. 189, 244; Simonetta (2018), p. 272.

<sup>55</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1189, docc. 51, 99; legajo 1209, docc. 38, 39; legajo 1472, docc. 172, 174-175, 176, 178-179; ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 51, ff. 140v, 142r-142v, 194v-195r, 218r-219v; Filza 96, ff. 25v, 26r, 30r, 38v-39r, 47v-51r; Filza 97, ff. 11v, 12r; ASMo, *Casa e Stato*, c. 153, *Istruttione à messer Alessandro Bendidio*, 26 settembre 1552, pp. 2-11: 5-6; BNF, *Département des manuscrits, Français 3118, Instruction au Sr de Contay*, f. 1v; de La Roncière (1905), pp. 642, 650; Martelli (2019).

<sup>56</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 96, f. 30r.



the French invasion of Corsica (1553) – the manoeuvres of the two fleets proved difficult to coordinate, given the long distances. Equally complicated were the communications between fleets and land armies. A constant flow of agents and information between the court of the Valois and that of the Sultan proved to be a key factor, as well as the intervention of mediators qualified for their relations with Muslim rulers and their knowledge of Muslim customs.<sup>57</sup>

As we shall see in the following, thanks to the transfer of the debt through bills of exchange, Roberto and Piero Strozzi proved to be capable and generous financiers of the travel expenses of ambassadors and emissaries. We also know that in 1544 Leone Strozzi – appointed to escort the fleet of Khairreddin Barbarossa to Constantinople – managed to avoid an irreparable break with the Holy See, dissuading the famous privateer and regent of Algiers from attacking the papal port of Civitavecchia. Then Leone followed Barbarossa to Constantinople, where he was able to consolidate the friendly relationship with him and with his son and successor Hasan Pasha. In the following years, Leone maintained close relations with the new regent of Algiers – to whom he sent oars and cannons for his galleys – through at least two emissaries: the Florentine exile Gioacchino Guasconi and Giovanni Battista Casella Corso, a skilled soldier and sailor, but also an expert in Arabic language and customs, already favoured by Barbarossa and very well connected both in Constantinople and Algiers.<sup>58</sup>

### Seeking allies: Venice and Rome

In the last decades of the Italian Wars, Venice became – by virtue of its neutrality and geographical position – the main base of the anti-Habsburg exiles in northern Italy, as well as a hot spot in com-

<sup>57</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1189, doc. 58.

<sup>58</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 96, ff. 24r-24v, 28r, 65v-66r; Bosio (1602), p. 232; Ribier (1666), vol. II, p. 128; Mafrici (2003), pp. 650-651, 656-657.

munication between France and Constantinople. A circumstance that gave the French ambassador to the Serenissima three roles that were essential to the king's war effort in Italy: collector of military and political information, which flowed to Venice from central and Balkan Europe and from all over the Mediterranean; officer in charge of the payments of salaries and subsidies to officers and supporters of the Valois in Veneto, Romagna, Emilia and Tuscany; officer appointed to dispense the royal favour to foreign exiles and captains settled in Venice seeking employment, but above all to the nobles of the *Terraferma* and to the patricians of the capital willing to join the local pro-French faction.<sup>59</sup>

In 1542 Piero and his brothers were banished from Venice, due to the brief diplomatic crisis between the Serenissima and the Valois, which began when some pro-French agents infiltrating the Venetian high political establishment were discovered and prosecuted. Nonetheless, Piero and Roberto supported French ambassadors in many ways even in the 1540s, also thanks to the safe-conducts obtained for them by the ambassadors themselves.<sup>60</sup> Their personal funds and the credit provided by their partners in Rome, Venice and Lyon allowed them to mobilize large sums for military expenses, for the salaries of the royal officers and for the ambassadors' current expenses. Furthermore, the transfer of debt through bills of exchange allowed the Strozzi to provide directly in Venice both their own money and that anticipated in Lyon by the ambassadors' agents, avoiding the inconveniences and dangers of physical cash transfer.<sup>61</sup>

Very well connected in Venice since the time of Filippo, the Strozzi enlarged their network including their agents and financial partners – Neri Capponi, Francesco Corboli, Francesco de' Pazzi and

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<sup>59</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1205, docc. 82-83, 93-94; ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, doc. 185; *Mediceo del Principato*, Filza 357, f. 2v; Alazard (2018); Alonge (2019a), pp. 58-67, 97, 106-108, 122-130.

<sup>60</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, doc. 180; Simonetta (2018), p. 156; Alonge (2019a), pp. 101-102, 133-134, 189-190.

<sup>61</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, docc. 180, 188; c. 12, doc. 3.

Francesco Nasi –<sup>62</sup> artists and musicians, exiles from all the Peninsula, important prelates – such as the patriarch of Aquileia Marino Grimani, an active supporter of Piero's expeditions in 1544 –<sup>63</sup> and finally gentlemen and noblemen of the *Terraferma*: professional soldiers eager to serve Piero in arms, gathering companies of infantry and cavalry and even plotting sudden attacks in the nearby State of Milan, such as Count Giulio Thiene, from Vicenza, Count Giorgio Martinengo and Captain Giulio Cipriano known as Turchetto, from Brescia.<sup>64</sup>

On January 2<sup>nd</sup> 1542 Turchetto, with a small company of soldiers, entered the Friulian coastal fortress of Marano, belonging to the emperor's brother, Ferdinand of Habsburg.<sup>65</sup> Soon Piero Strozzi took control of the conquered stronghold, strengthening its defences and increasing the garrison, thanks to the money provided by Roberto, who fled (almost) undisturbed from Venice. Later the Florentine general proposed to the Serenissima to buy the fortress, threatening to surrender it to the Ottomans in case of refusal.<sup>66</sup>

The fearless undertaking was actually part of a well thought-out trick by François I and by the pro-French faction of the Venetian Senate. The fortress of Marano was a real thorn in the side for the communications of Venice with its eastern territories: king François I and Piero hoped that the Venetians would accept the greedy offer – as indeed they did – and accept an alliance with France to defend themselves against the violent reaction of the Habsburgs. But there was no retaliation by Charles V: on the contrary, the emperor forbade his brother to wage war to regain Marano, both because he hoped to involve the Serenissima in an alliance and because he was

<sup>62</sup> Pellicier (1899), vol. I, p. 157; Gaeta (1960), p. 287; Simonetta (2018), pp. 186-187.

<sup>63</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie I, Filza 95, f. 366v.

<sup>64</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1192, docc. 260, 261, 262, 268; ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 135, *Alli 2 di Agosto 1554. La rotta dello Strozzi, Morti et priggioni della rotta di Piero Strozzi*; Serie V, Filza 1212, Giulio da Thiene to Piero Strozzi, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1555; Pellicier (1899), vol. I, pp. 96-97; vol. II, pp. 582, 584.

<sup>65</sup> Alberi (1853), p. 120.

<sup>66</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 135, *Ristretto di notizie*, f. 384r; *Mediceo del Principato*, Filza 357, f. 23r; Paruta (1703), pp. 464-465.

very well advised by his ambassador to Venice, Diego Hurtado de Mendoza.<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, the Marano enterprise galvanized the anti-Medici exiles, earned Piero 35,000 *ducati* and worsened the contrasts between Charles V and his brother Ferdinand.<sup>68</sup>

A very similar plan was conceived in June 1544, this time to tempt the uncertain Pope Paul III Farnese. The baits were the coastal fortresses of Porto Ercole and Talamone, recently taken by the joint French and Ottoman fleets. For this purpose, Leone Strozzi sent one of his most trusted captains, Baccio Martelli, to Rome and financed his mission with the money (500 *scudi*) provided by Luigi Del Riccio, agent of the Strozzi in Rome.<sup>69</sup> More or less on the same days, Piero Strozzi, pursued by the imperial army of the governor of Milan, crossed the Po river and obtained provisions and shelter from the son of Paul III, Pierluigi Farnese, papal governor of Parma and Piacenza. Several contemporary chroniclers hypothesized that the two brothers pursued the same goal: to induce the Farnese to arouse the emperor's rage, forcing them to seek the protection of the Valois.<sup>70</sup>

Certainly, the Strozzi were the king of France's closest servants to the papal throne and the Farnese family, and therefore the ideal agents to build the alliance the Valois were so keen to obtain.

Papal bankers since the two Medici pontificates, the Strozzi had maintained their role even under Paul III, also in the belief that the road back to Florence – for them as for the Medici in the past – would pass above all through Rome.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> AGS, *Estado*, legajo 1318, docc. 16, 18; ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 97, ff. 85r-85v; Filza 135, *Ristretto di notizie*, ff. 383v, 384r; Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, doc. 36; Paruta (1718), pp. 156-158; Adriani (1822), vol. I, pp. 252-253; Alberi (1853), pp. 105-107, 170, 322-324; Albizzi (1866), pp. 532-533; Pellicier (1899), vol. II, p. 561; Simoncelli (2016), pp. 91-92; Alonge (2019a), pp. 121, 131.

<sup>68</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 97, f. 6v; Paruta (1718), p. 157; Alberi (1853), p. 105; Rodríguez-Salgado (1994), pp. 64, 66; Le Gall (2015), pp. 131-136; Della Mea (2017); Simoncelli (2018), pp. 63-64.

<sup>69</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 12, doc. 62.

<sup>70</sup> Affò (1821), pp. 56-57, 59.

<sup>71</sup> von Albertini (1970), pp. 19-20, 24-25, 94, 105, 181-183.

As it is known, the popes of the sixteenth century relied almost entirely on bankers for the collection of taxes, through the sale of collection rights, or the assignment of State revenues as a guarantee or payback for loans. In 1539 Roberto Strozzi took over from his father Filippo as a 50% partner in Benvenuto Olivieri's Roman financial enterprise. Up to the late 1530s Filippo had lent imposing sums of money to the Medici popes and to Paul III, so much so that he could present his son Piero as a candidate to become Cardinal. In the 1540s the bank (*ragione*) of Olivieri purchased the rights to collect the revenues of the provincial treasuries (*tesorerie*) of Perugia, from 1541 to 1546, and Romagna, from 1545 to 1551. Olivieri and Roberto Strozzi also gained assignments on the substantial revenues of the *Tesoreria pontificia*, the salt duty of Parma and Piacenza and the tithes of Urbino, Perugia and Bologna. They also purchased the collection rights of various extraordinary tributes.<sup>72</sup>

In addition, Roberto was also the financier of the pope's son, Pierluigi Farnese and of many prelates residing in the Eternal City: among them, the Cardinal Agostino Trivulzio – from 1523 to 1548 *Cardinal de Couronne*, the protector of French interests before the Holy See – and the Cardinal Nephew Alessandro Farnese, who in 1542 acted as godfather to Piero's son, Filippo. Precious servant of both the pope and the Valois, Roberto was, therefore, the most suitable agent to assist the king's ambassador and the *Cardinal de Couronne* in the negotiations with the Holy Father: when in 1548 the longed-for alliance between the papacy and France seemed on the point of being concluded, the parties agreed that the fund set up to meet common expenses (350,000 *scudi*) should be entrusted to Roberto, a solvent banker, capable and devoted to both monarchs.<sup>73</sup>

But Strozzi's influence in Rome probably increased with the suc-

<sup>72</sup> Guidi Bruscoli (2000), pp. 64, 106, 116, 162-170, 170-176, 258-259, 299; Guidi Bruscoli (2007), pp. 535, 542; Simonetta (2019b).

<sup>73</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, doc. 130; Ribier (1666), vol. II, pp. 179-180; Serristori (1853), p. 120; Baudouin-Matuszek-Ouvarov (1991), pp. 254-255; Guidi Bruscoli (2000), p. 242; Simonetta (2018), pp. 154, 202.

cession of Pope Paul IV. Eager to acquire allies in the College of Cardinals and among the Neapolitan exiles, during the war for Siena (1552) Piero granted the nephew of Cardinal Gian Pietro Carafa, Carlo, the prestigious command of the stronghold of Porto Ercole. When Gian Pietro became pope (1555), Carlo was appointed Cardinal Nephew and Piero became his most trusted advisor. In December 1555, Piero accompanied the Cardinal Nephew to France to negotiate the alliance between the pope and king Henri II and encouraged him to persevere in his pro-French attitudes, despite the disappointment of the Vaucelles truce (February 5<sup>th</sup> 1556). Thanks to the good offices of Carlo Carafa, Piero was appointed commander of the defence of Rome in the war against Felipe II of Habsburg, and later obtained the rank of Cardinal for his younger brother Lorenzo (March 1557).<sup>74</sup>

### **Profit, service and favour: a network of bankers**

Royal finances got into serious difficulties in 1537 when François I had to personally stop a great offensive against Milan, due to the alarming indebtedness of the kingdom. In the mid-1550s, the kingdom's revenues – both ordinary and extraordinary – were all pledged as guarantees or alienated as payback for loans contracted in Lyon. In 1536-1538 the expenses for the war amounted to 15,000,000 *livres*, in 1542-1544 to 30,000,000 *livres*. In 1547 the debt of the Crown towards the bankers amounted to 6,860,000 *livres*, and increased up to 43,000,000 *livres* by the end of the 1550s: the king of France was now requesting loans to pay off debts.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 51, ff. 129r-130v; Filza 135, *Ristretto di notizie*, ff. 401r, 413r; *Decifrato della lettera del Re di Francia a Piero Strozzi*, s.d. [1554]; Romier (1913), p. 10; Prosperi (1976); Santarelli (2005), pp. 11-15; Simonetta (2018), pp. 266-267, 269-272; Vanni (2018).

<sup>75</sup> Doucet (1933), pp. 474-475, 480, 489-493, 498-501, 506, 509-512; Baudouin-Matuszek-Ouvarov (1991), pp. 281-282; Hamon (1994), cap. I, secc. 90-91; Potter (1995), pp. 145-149.

The financial situation explains the considerable increase in the bargaining power of the bankers closest to the throne, all the more so in the case of the Strozzi, bankers and commanders. The persistence of war emergency forced the king to pay off the debts contracted to obtain new loans, adding concessions of different nature to the mere economic profit and strengthening his financiers' influence and prestige.<sup>76</sup> In October 1542, for example, Piero offered the king a loan of 30,000 *scudi* to finance operations on the Italian front, under the condition that the Treasure paid him back the money lent by the Strozzi. A very convenient proposal for the Strozzi and for François I that acquired also an important political significance for the Florentine exiles – and for their leader –, pushing France to resume the initiative on the Italian front.<sup>77</sup>

In 1553 the salaries for Piero's positions at court and in the army amounted to 36,000 *livres* per year. The Strozzi had also other significant income coming from privateering raids at sea, the fiefdoms of Epernay and Belleville (more than 3,000 *scudi*), the office of Senior Judge in the Provençal land of Lorgues (2,000 *scudi*) and the salt duty of Provence (40,000 *livres*). But Piero was also raised to the ranks of Marshal of France and knight of the prestigious Order of Saint Michael, while Roberto was granted positions at court, as well as a naturalization letter from the king. It was also thanks to the support of French diplomacy in Rome that Lorenzo – already bishop of Béziers and abbot of Saint-Victor near Marseille – was promoted to the rank of cardinal. Furthermore, Queen Caterina herself arranged the advantageous marriage of Piero's daughter, Clarice, with the Count of Tenda and Sommariva Onorato I, a powerful Provençal lord and pretender to the ducal throne of Savoy.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Bullard (2008), p. 128; Baudouin-Matuszek-Ouvarov (1991), pp. 279–280.

<sup>77</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozzi*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, docc. 155, 158.

<sup>78</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozzi*, Serie III, Filza 96, f. 40r; Filza 97, ff. 9r–9v, 157r–157v; Filza 135, *Memorie del Marescial Piero Strozzi*, f. 424v; *Ristretto di notizie*, ff. 384r, 387r, 408r, 412v, 418r, 420r; Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, doc. 88; Filza 1212, Bartolomeo del Bene to Piero Strozzi, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1555; Giovanni Moretti da Nizza to Piero Strozzi, 1<sup>st</sup> January and 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1556; *Informatione sopra la presa delle lane facta dalla Galera di Monsignore*

A relationship – that between a patron, the sovereign, who granted his favour to a client in order to allow him to provide more qualified services – fuelled the war effort, providing both soldiers and money. As we have seen, the king asked Piero and Leone to make the most of their personal influence – and of the authority and prestige linked to the positions granted them – to attract nobles and capable soldiers to their service, and therefore to the service of the Valois in Italy. Similarly, royal financiers such as Roberto and Piero Strozzi, or Albizzo Del Bene in his capacity of Superintendent of royal finances, or his agent Francesco Nasi – the main banker of the French war effort in Italy in the 1550s – were asked by the king to obtain new loans for the war effort, taking advantage of their relationships in the main financial centres. They also had both to reassure their colleagues about the profitable nature of the loan transactions with the Crown, and to act as guarantors of the lent sums' repayment. In carrying out this task, the bankers closest to the sovereign resorted to their personal possessions – more credible guarantees than the promises of an indebted monarchy –, but also to the prestige of their role as high-ranking officials of the royal bureaucracy, listened by the king, by his ministers and by the queen: a role that made them able to intercede with the king in favour of fellow bankers willing to support the war effort, in order to obtain from the sovereign the payoff for previous loans, tax exemptions, commercial privileges and preferential treatment before the royal tribunals.<sup>79</sup>

In practical terms, the Strozzi contributed to the war effort through personal and business relations with their financial colleagues that were the main result of their solvency, the distinctive

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*Marescial Strozzi*, 1556; Filza 1213, Flaminio Anguillara to Piero Strozzi, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1556; Romier (1913), pp. 154, 282-283, 393; Gaeta (1967b), pp. 33, 327, 332; Simonetta (2018), pp. 198-199, 250-251, 283.

<sup>79</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 97, ff. 6v, 91r-94r; Du Gabre (1903), pp. 130, 192; Lanssac (1904), pp. 328, 370-371, 381-382; Romier (1913), p. 144; Doucet (1933), pp. 486, 502, 511; Baudouin-Matuszek-Ouvarov (1991), pp. 252-253, 255, 262-263, 266-267; Hamon (1994), cap. III, secc. 6, 10-11, 13-14; Hamon (1999), cap. I, sec. 199; Potter (1995), pp. 145-148; Kettering (2002); Tognetti (2014), p. 356; Tognetti (2015), p. 705.



sign of their “economic citizenship.” In fact, the transfer of the debt system through bills of exchange was based on these close relations: basically the banker who entered into a loan agreement with the royal treasury issued a payment order for an intermediary banker in favour of a third colleague, who had to pay the money to the general, to the ambassador or to the king’s ally which the money itself was intended to. The intermediary banker had just to note in his book the colleague who had paid as debtor and the colleague who had received the sum as creditor. Through the many possible variants of this model, the royal revenues alienated or assigned in Lyon could thus be transformed into cash in the financial centres of Venice, Rome and Ferrara, the closest centres to the enclave of Mirandola, Parma and Siena. The movements of scriptural money, or book money, made it possible to avoid cash transfers, even riskier for the French armies in the Peninsula, often separated from each other by enemy territories.<sup>80</sup> The transfer of the debt system also allowed the Strozzi to easily and quickly finance the continuous movements of Piero and Roberto between Italy and France, the supplies for Leone’s fleet and the travel expenses of kings of France’s agents and ambassadors heading for Constantinople.<sup>81</sup>

In chapter XXXI of the second part of the *Quijote*, the *ingenioso hidalgo* remarks that “the lord is the more considered the more his servants are men of honour and of noble birth, and [...] one of the greatest advantages princes enjoy is to be able to avail themselves of their equal in nobility as servants”:<sup>82</sup> likewise, the Strozzi, great bankers, could count on the services of other great bankers.

<sup>80</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 51, f. 13r; Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, docc. 167, 195, 200, 209; Davanzati (1853), pp. 429-436; Du Gabre (1903), pp. 8-9, 18-19, 26, 84-85, 86-87, 125-126, 242, 267-268; Lanssac (1904), pp. 391-392; Romier (1913), p. 145; Baudouin-Matuszek-Ouvarov (1991), pp. 255-256, 260-261; Hamon (1994), cap. III, sec. 7; Feldman (1995), p. 29; Padgett-McLean (2011), pp. 15, 18, 23, 27, 35-36; Palermo (2013), secc. 2-3, 20, 24, 26-30; Tognetti (2015), pp. 705-706; Matringe (2016), pp. 75-77.

<sup>81</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, docc. 167, 168; c. 12, docc. 100, 164; Hamon (1999), cap. II, sec. 29; Bullard (2008), p. 166; Garnier (2008), p. 210; Tognetti (2013), p. 37; Simonetta (2018), pp. 154-155.

<sup>82</sup> Cervantes Saavedra (1999), II, cap. XXX.

In October 1542, the Florentine banker in Venice Francesco Corboli sent Piero a record of the movements on all the accounts opened by the Strozzi at his bank, for a total of 32,526 *scudi*. 14,100 had been paid to the French ambassador to the Serenissima, 500 to the French ambassador in Rome, and 664 to the Count of Mirandola. For this money, Piero had been marked as a debtor to a third Florentine banker, Giovanni Francesco Bini. The dates of the letter sent by Corboli to Piero (October 28<sup>th</sup>) and of the one similar in content addressed to Roberto by his main agent in Venice, Neri Capponi (October 18<sup>th</sup>), were not accidental. In fact, Capponi and Corboli intended to clear the debt with Bini – who also financed the expenses for Leone's galleys – during the fair that was to be held in Lyon on All Saints' Day. Capponi, therefore, asked Roberto to press Piero and Leone to obtain the reimbursement from the king for their expenses and for their loans. Capponi, however, also offered to have the debt recorded on his own account at the Bini's bank in Lyon, if the two brothers could not collect what was due to them in time.<sup>83</sup>

It is noteworthy that the above-mentioned financiers had all been agents and partners of Filippo Strozzi and that each of them was linked to all the others by business relationships, if not by family ties. Giovanni Francesco Bini, related to Neri Capponi on his mother's side, had been one of the main agents of Filippo Strozzi in Lyon; he was also a partner of Benvenuto Olivieri, and Roberto Strozzi in the French trade of the highly sought-after alum imported from the Papal States. Furthermore, Gian Francesco had opened, starting from 1538, numerous companies – in particular, for silk trade in the Iberian Peninsula – with one of the most important intermediaries of Roberto Strozzi in Lyon: Palla Strozzi, the son of Lorenzo, Filippo's elder brother and partner.<sup>84</sup> In Rome, Neri Cap-

<sup>83</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, docc. 155, 158, 160, 167, 168; Cassandro (1979); Tognetti (2014), p. 356.

<sup>84</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 135, Palla Strozzi to Roberto Strozzi, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1546; Litta (1870), tavola XII; Luzzati (1968a); Luzzati (1968b); Baudouin-Matuszek-Ouvarov (1991), p. 253; Guidi Bruscoli (2000), pp. 213-214, 250-251, 299; Matringe (2016), p. 288; Decaria (2019).

poni had been the most trusted employee of the very wealthy Florentine banker Bindo Altoviti, one of the major financiers of the anti-Medici resistance. From 1532 Capponi became his uncle Filippo Strozzi's right hand in Lyons, and finally his executor, together with Benvenuto Olivieri. From 1538 and until at least 1544, he managed Piero's and Roberto's business in Venice, along with Francesco Corboli. He was also involved in Olivieri's activities as a papal financier, sometimes as a front man of Roberto Strozzi, sometimes through the banker Luigi Del Riccio.<sup>85</sup>

Therefore, mutual relations made up a network, that was extremely necessary to soldiers-bankers, as the speed of the transfer of wealth was – and is – proportional to the mutual trust of the financial operators:<sup>86</sup> this network also multiplied Piero's and his brothers' financial capacities. During the war for Siena another agent of the Strozzi in Lyon, Andrea Rinieri, paid Leo 2,000 *scudi* to keep the fleet at sea and persuaded his business partner, Giovanni Battista da Sommaia, to provide as many. The officer in charge of repairing Piero's galleys and of feeding and paying his crews, Cosimo Valbella, was himself a financier, often requested to spend his own money and that of his partners.<sup>87</sup>

Evidently, the partnership of these agents with the Strozzi entailed mutual obligations very similar to those of the Strozzi towards the king and his main ministers. Certainly, "friends" and subordinates expected a concrete gain: interest on loans, brokerage fees, profits on the difference in the cost of money between one financial centre and another. But they also received favours of various kinds from the Strozzi, according to the same mechanisms of patronage that regulated the relations between the Valois and the four brothers.<sup>88</sup> In August 1541, for instance, Giovanni Francesco Bini rec-

<sup>85</sup> Niccolini (1847), pp. 315-331; Feldman (1995), pp. 24-25, 27, 37; Guidi Bruscoli (2000), pp. 47, 113-114, 230, 233, 243, 249, 258; Simoncelli (2006), p. 54; Simoncelli (2018), pp. 197, 216.

<sup>86</sup> Bullard (2008), pp. 3-4; Guidi Bruscoli (2000), pp. 258-259; Palermo (2013), secc. 6-7.

<sup>87</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie V, Filza 1212, Andrea Rinieri to Piero Strozzi, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1555; Flaminio Anguillara to Piero Strozzi, 26<sup>th</sup> August 1555; Filza 1213, Andrea Rinieri to Piero Strozzi, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1556.

<sup>88</sup> Jouanna (1995); Padgett-McLean (2011), pp. 15-16, 37.

commended to Piero his protégé captain Cecchino, eager to serve under the Florentine general.<sup>89</sup> An agent of the Strozzi in Rome, Migliore Covoni – a sort of ambiguous factotum, who had already financed the Montemurlo expedition – was appointed knight of St. John through Leone's intercession, to reward him for his services.<sup>90</sup> The favours and the services received were therefore of different nature.

Thanks to his connections among the Venetian Savi di Terraferma, Francesco Corboli proved to be an excellent collector of information circulating in Venice, a role as important in business as in warfare.<sup>91</sup> On several occasions, he handled business on behalf of the Strozzi with the government of the Serenissima, showing his skills also as the negotiator of Marano's sale.<sup>92</sup> In February 1556, Piero's partner and agent in Lyon, Alfonso Gondi, served the Florentine general both as a real estate agent for the purchase of land and castles in Lazio, and as a negotiator with the College of Cardinals and with the French ministers in Rome, with the task of obtaining Piero's appointment as commander of the Eternal city's defence.<sup>93</sup> Luigi Del Riccio – very useful to the cause of the Florentine republicans also as a close friend of Michelangelo – and Palla Strozzi served the four brothers also as administrators, respectively, of their estate at Lunghezza, near Rome, and of their ecclesiastical benefices in Provence.<sup>94</sup>

Above all, among their partners and agents Piero and Leone could choose the most skilled mediators who represented them at

<sup>89</sup> ASFi, *Mediceo del Principato*, Filza 351, f. 548r.

<sup>90</sup> Varchi (1838-1841), vol. III, p. 297; Serristori (1853), p. 120; Vestri (2017), p. 116.

<sup>91</sup> Palermo (2013), sec. 29; Tognetti (2014), p. 365.

<sup>92</sup> ASFi, *Carte Stroziane*, Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, docc. 154, 167, 169, 172; de Leva (1867), pp. 505-506; Predelli (2012), pp. 246-247.

<sup>93</sup> ASFi, *Carte Stroziane*, Serie V, Filza 1212, Alfonso Gondi to Piero Strozzi, 1<sup>st</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>th</sup> January 1556; Piero Strozzi to Alfonso Gondi, 16<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1555; Simonetta (2018), p. 203.

<sup>94</sup> ASFi, *Carte Stroziane*, Serie III, Filza 135, Palla Strozzi to Roberto Strozzi, 16<sup>th</sup> April 1546; Serie V, Filza 1210, c. 10, docc. 34, 191; c. 12, doc. 62; *Mediceo del Principato*, Filza 371, ff. 42r, 43r; Filza 385, f. 17r; Agee (1985), p. 236; Procaccioli (1990).

the French court – such as Giovanni Lanfredini –, as well as the officers in charge of provisioning and paying their armies and their fleets: a task that required military, maritime, but above all banking and commercial skills, as well as good connections in the operations' theatres and in the nearby territories. Since it was not common for the king to send money for wages and provisions, the appointed commissary was to be capable of converting the assignments on the royal revenues, or on the loans stipulated in Lyon into cash or food (*render vivi*). For his expedition to Scotland in 1548, Piero could count on the very skilled Baccio Martelli; the wages of the Strozzi's army in Marano were paid by the banker Francesco de' Pazzi, Piero's lieutenant in Piedmont in the early 1540s and later Roberto's agent in Venice; as commissary of the French army in Siena, Piero appointed the unscrupulous Alfonso Calcina. The Strozzi's agents proved to be much more reliable than the royal *munitionnaires*, rigidly bound to the spending ceiling settled by the king and also accustomed to saving at the soldiers' expenses, in order to pocket the difference.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusions

Some of the witnesses of the events saw the struggle of the Strozzi against the Medici as the unrealistic dream of glory of an ambitious and unlucky general, Piero, who squandered his inheritance to fight a war lost from the beginning, ignoring the warnings of his wiser brother Roberto, a pragmatic banker.<sup>96</sup>

Certainly, Piero – notoriously munificent both as patron and king servant –<sup>97</sup> left his heir many debts, but he remained until his death, together with his brother Leone, one of the most beloved gen-

<sup>95</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 96, f. 36r; Filza 135, Giovanni Lanfredini to Roberto Strozzi, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1544; ASMo, *Casa e Stato*, c. 390, *Capitolazione pertinente alla causa clusina*; Ribier (1666), vol. I, p. 193; Pellicier (1899), vol. II, p. 539; Hamon (1994), cap. I, secc. 43, 53, 77-78.

<sup>96</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie I, Filza 95, f. 366v

<sup>97</sup> Bourdeille Brantôme (1822), p. 459.

erals of king Henri II. Furthermore, Piero's efforts created the conditions for the dazzling French careers of his son Filippo and his brother Lorenzo – cardinal and soldier during the Wars of Religion –, both under queen Caterina's protection. There are no evidence that Piero's and Leone's military expenses resulted in a greatly diminished family's patrimony. On the contrary, in 1551 the Strozzi's revenues and real estate in Rome were valued 120,000 *ducati*; in 1555 Piero and Roberto were considered capable of providing the king with a sum of 140,000 *scudi* for the defence of Siena.<sup>98</sup>

Archival sources also show the coincidence of purposes among the four brothers and a certain degree of interchangeability of their roles: Piero and Leone distinguished themselves as diplomats and sailors; Roberto enlisted, led troops and performed government and command functions during the war for Siena; Piero himself, a celebrated military engineer, also knew how to scrutinize the records of his expenses and incomes.

Despite the lost battles and the smallness of the conquered territories, the contribution of the Strozzi was fundamental in the attrition war between the Habsburgs and the Valois. The four brothers and their network of soldiers and bankers provided the French war effort in Italy both with human resources of high value and with an effective financial support, aiding the kings of France to acquire credibility as a political alternative to the Habsburg hegemony in the Peninsula. The military initiatives of the Strozzi proved – and still prove – the resilient, strategic and political importance of the Italian theatre in the mid-sixteenth century, but also the reciprocal interaction between war and economy, one of the distinctive features of the global struggle among powers, in Europe and overseas, during the Early Modern Age.

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<sup>98</sup> ASFi, *Carte Strozziiane*, Serie III, Filza 135, *Ristretto di notizie*, f. 383r; Guidi Bruscoli (2000), p. 64; Simonetta (2018), pp. 233, 264, 283; Alonge (2019b).

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