



An Ambassador for a Diversion? Giuliano Soderini and his Florentine Embassy in France (1527-29)

Pierre Nevejans

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A R T I C L E S

PIERRE NEVEJANS

École normale supérieure de Lyon

Laboratoire Triangle UMR 5206

AN AMBASSADOR AS A DIVERSION?
GIULIANO SODERINI AND HIS FLORENTINE
MISSION IN FRANCE (1527–29)*

Abstract

In 1527, after the Sack of Rome by Imperial Troops, the Medici are chased from Florence. The oligarchic government of the Dieci is reinstated. The Dieci need a new ambassador. In particular, they need a man of trust in France, where the king ought still to be convinced to defend Florence and Tuscany against imperial troops. They choose pro-republic Bishop Giuliano Soderini of Saintes. The embassy and life of Giuliano Soderini have been strangely and almost systematically omitted in the existing literature on the subject. His letters were completely excluded from previous editions of Florentine letters of this period. This paper aims to restore them to their rightful place. It presents Giuliano Soderini's personal and political background before and after his French mission. His diplomatic functions, needs and difficulties are detailed thanks to an extended and thorough reading of his correspondence in and out of France, preserved in France and Italy. This archival work led to the writing of an updated catalogue of his diplomatic correspondence from July 1527 to February 1529.

Keywords: Franco-Italian relations, Florentine nation in France, Florentine republic (1527–30)

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In July 1527, Giuliano Soderini (†1544), Florentine citizen and bishop of Saintes, was elected to be the Florentine ambassador to France. He was to represent a state that did not exist a few weeks before. He was to replace Roberto Acciaiuoli, both papal nuncio and Florentine envoy, who had been there for thirteen months. This faithful servant of the Medici could no longer represent Florence after the anti-Medici rebellion of May 1527 and the restoration of the republican oligarchic regime which had ruled Florence from 1494 to 1513.¹ From a Florentine perspective, this revolution reversed a part of Tuscan political clienteles, giving space to families that had operated either unofficially or abroad for almost fifteen years. From a wider European point of view, it revealed a strong network of underground Florentine agents, who seem to have waited for the right moment to take their role, operating in the shadows for years to maintain their own political ideas alive.² In the middle of summer 1527, Florence needed either a rapid peace – in order to prevent the Emperor from invading the city – or financial and military support to be able to defend itself against the imperial troops.³

For the last two decades, historians have reconsidered Early modern diplomatic practices. They abandoned the idea of a ‘modern diplomacy’ which would have relied on ambassadors’ sole residency and the spread of vast networks of information and representation.⁴ Instead, diplomacy ought to be considered a ‘flexible political activity’, whose dynamics can no longer be considered separately.⁵ The diplomatic actors could

¹ Olivier Rouchon, ‘L’invenzione del Principato (1512–1609)’, in *Firenze e la Toscana. Genesi e trasformazioni di uno stato (XIV–XIX secolo)*, ed. by Jean Boutier, Sandro Landi, and Olivier Rouchon (Florence: Mandragora, 2010), pp. 55–75 (pp. 56–57); Alessandro Cecchi, *In difesa della dolce libertà. L’assedio di Firenze (1529–1530)* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2018), pp. 1–6; Alessandro Monti, *L’assedio di Firenze (1529–1530). Politica, diplomazia e conflitto durante le guerre d’Italia* (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2015), pp. 26–29.

² Paolo Simoncelli, *Fuoruscitismo repubblicano fiorentino, 1530–54*, vol. 1: *1530–1537* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2006); Marcello Simonetta, *Volpi e leoni: I misteri dei Medici* (Rome: Rizzoli, 2017), pp. 197–202.

³ Monti, pp. 35–36.

⁴ John Warkins, ‘Toward a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 38 (2008), 1–14 (p. 2).

⁵ Isabella Lazzarini, *Communication & Conflict. Italian Diplomacy in the Early Renaissance, 1350–1520* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 4; Isabella

then be reconsidered through a wider range, beyond the ambassador's figure, to a history of 'diplomatic agents'.⁶ This concept was tested with missions which had become possible to study as diplomatic.⁷ The cases of agents simultaneously sent on the ground, with a different status and the consequences on their work, should be tested further. Paola Volpini showed the stakes of this simultaneity with the Florentine presence in Spain at the end of the sixteenth century. To her, the arrival at power of a new grand-duke in Florence had caused a massive reform of the Florentine diplomatic system. This reform had involved the agents beyond their own limits of understanding.⁸ The drawing of a new diplomatic line could then be considered as characteristic of a new government. The central state would send multiple agents, considering them both individually and collectively. Furthermore, we still lack information about the consequences of these practices on the agents themselves. What were the stakes of putting simultaneously several agents to the same authorities? Was their action changed when they were competed – or supported – by other agents? How did they perceive these practices during their missions?

Almost completely ignored until now,⁹ Soderini is a fertile *terra nova* to draw a history of diplomacy which would study the ambassador

Lazzarini, 'À propos de diplomatie médiévale: pratiques, modèles et langages de la négociation en Italie (XIVe–XVe siècles)', *Médiévales*, 74 (2018), 133–54 (p. 135).

⁶ Lazzarini, *Communication*, p. 124.

⁷ *Double Agents: Cultural and Political Brokerage in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Marika Keblusek, Badeloch Noldus (Leiden: Brill, 2011); *Your Humble Servant. Agents in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Hans Cools, Marika Keblusek, Badeloch Noldus (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Berloren, 2006); Anna Busquets, 'Three Manila-Fujian Diplomatic Encounters: Different Aims and Different Embassies in the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 23 (2019), 442–57 (p. 443).

⁸ Paola Volpini, *Los Medici y España. Príncipes, embajadores y agentes en la edad moderna* (Madrid: Silex, 2017), chapter: 'Embajadores, agentes y secretarios de Fernando I. La reorganización de la embajada medicea en España', pp. 83–112.

⁹ He is one of the members of the Soderini family who was not dealt with in the 93th volume of the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (hereafter cited as: *DBI*) published in 2018. His relatives, including his uncles Piero and Francesco, are well documented. Some short notices exist, but they mostly focus on his life as bishop. There is only one real biographical notice, written by Luigi Passerini in the nineteenth century (in Pompeo Litta, *Famiglie celebri d'Italia. Soderini di Firenze* [Rome: 1861],

as an actor among others.¹⁰ His correspondence from his embassy in France (1527–29) tells us about early modern diplomatic practices when a situation of crisis forced governments and their representatives to revise a diplomatic line of conduit slightly. In 1527, the Florentine Republic could either choose to continue, to modify or the reverse the former Medici policy. Because of the multiform and changing geopolitical context,¹¹ the timeline of events of this embassy is an essential data.¹² From the beginning of his mission, Soderini had to deal with the presence of another Florentine ambassador towards the French authorities. His ‘colleague’, Anton Francesco degli Albizzi, was appointed to the lead of the French army operating then in Italy against the troops of Emperor Charles V. Then, in order to understand the consequences of this double representation on Soderini’s work in France, their dispatches were crossed along the narration of Soderini’s embassy. We used what Jean-Claude Zancarini calls a ‘slow reading’ of the texts¹³ to analyse Soderini’s consideration upon his part in the Florentine diplomacy from France. Writing the diachronic history of Soderini’s entire embassy was used to consider the political and social reasons that led to his election and his dismissal. This led to the restoration of the complex stakes of

p. 6), based partly on unreliable sources. Soderini had almost completely been excluded by Abel Desjardins and Giuseppe Canestrini, who edited many Florentine documents concerning negotiations with France in late medieval and early modern times: *Négociations diplomatiques de la France avec la Toscane*, ed. by Giuseppe Canestrini et Abel Desjardins (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1859–86). To understand the lacunae of this edition, see Ernesto Pallandri, *Les négociations politiques et religieuses entre la Toscane et la France à l’époque de Cosme I^{er} et de Catherine de Médicis (1544–1580)* (Paris: A. Picard, 1908), pp. xxviii–xxx.

¹⁰ Daniela Frigo, ‘Introduction’, in *Politics and Diplomacy in Early modern Italy. The Structure of Diplomatic Practice, 1450–1800*, ed. by Daniela Frigo (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 1–24 (p. 10); Lazzarini, *Communication*, pp. 123–45.

¹¹ Marco Pellegrini, *Le guerre d’Italia, 1494–1559* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2017), pp. 178–83.

¹² Lucien Febvre, ‘Contre l’histoire diplomatique en soi. Histoire ou politique? Deux médiations: 1930, 1945’, in *Combats pour l’histoire* (Paris: A. Colin, 1953), pp. 61–70.

¹³ Jean-Claude Zancarini, ‘Une philologie politique’, *Laboratoire italien*, 7 (2007), 61–74 (pp. 64–65).

Florentine diplomacy, which would have used one ambassador as a lure, while other agents were doing the work.

Soderini's case comforts Isabella Lazzarini's wish to consider diplomacy as a flexible political activity.¹⁴ The untold competition he was stuck in also obliges to play with different viewpoints and to take different social layers into account.¹⁵ Seen as a competed and neglected agent, he appears to be used more as a diversion than as an actual operative meant to negotiate. This 'ambassador for a diversion' helps reconsider the goals of diplomacy. It enlightens the need to take height to understand how agents could be used as pawns on a chessboard. It also shows how those agents could consider or ignore this place in a wider diplomatic network.

The heart of this paper aims to present Soderini's embassy and *carteggio*, prevailing a rudimentary grid of analysis and some elements that could be taken further by scholars. For the reasons mentioned above, it has been decided here to present Soderini's embassy in the frame of his entire political career. The purpose is to consider his diplomatic involvement as deeply related to his personal path both in Italy and in France.¹⁶ His social and professional background was a motivation for his election, but also the cause of his inability to negotiate in France. Far away from considering a diplomatic mission as a privileged task,¹⁷ this paper confirms that diplomacy could also cause isolation and resentment.

GIULIANO SODERINI BEFORE 1527

Giuliano was a Soderini by his father and a Strozzi by his mother. He was born in the 1490s and in a background deeply attached to the Florentine

¹⁴ Lazzarini, 'À propos', p. 135.

¹⁵ *Sulla diplomazia in età moderna: politica, economia, religione*, ed. by Renzo Sabbatini, Paola Volpini (Milano, Franco Angeli, 2011), p. 11.

¹⁶ Alessandra Contini, 'Dinastia, patriziato e politica estera: ambasciatori e segretari medicei nel Cinquecento', *Cheiron*, 30 (1998), 57–131 (p. 79).

¹⁷ Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (New York: Cosimo, 2008), p. 104; the attempt to study diplomacy as a social (mobility) field without building a rigid grid of analysis has recently been made by Isabella Lazzarini, 'Italian Diplomacy: an Open Social Field (1350–1520 ca.)', in *Social Mobility in Medieval Italy*, ed. by Isabella Lazzarini and Sandro Carocci (Rome: Viella, 2018), pp. 185–198 (p. 186); see also Lazzarini, *Communication*, pp. 123–44.

republican regime. He was then anti-Medici almost by nature.¹⁸ In 1509, he replaced his uncle Francesco (1453–1524) as bishop of Volterra. In 1514, he added to this first bishopric the one of Vicenza.¹⁹ In 1522, he was appointed – still in the place of his uncle – bishop of Saintes in France, and resigned his Italian bishoprics.²⁰ Francesco Soderini had been appointed bishop of Saintes by Louis XII (reigned 1498–1515) after an important diplomatic mission in the mid-1490s. This position in Saintes tells a lot about the favours the Soderinis enjoyed at the French court: this rich bishopric contrasted with the southern ‘myriad’ of small bishoprics held by other Italian prelates.²¹ At the beginning of Francis I’s reign, this position was reinforced by its proximity to Cognac and Angoulême, the region of birth of the new king, very accessible from the valley of the Loire, still the region of central power in France.²² Francesco Soderini could then benefit both the economic situation of his bishopric and the kind ear of the Most Christian King. In 1522, his nephew inherited both.

Officially, Giuliano Soderini arrived in France to take place in his new bishopric – which he does indeed – but he was one of his uncle’s agents in France. Francesco Soderini was then involved in a conspiracy that targeted the cardinal Giulio de’ Medici (later Clement VII) in Rome, the viceroy Pignatelli in Sicily and the Medici power in Florence.²³ He had

¹⁸ Raffaella Zaccaria, ‘Soderini, Paoloantonio’, *DBI*, XCIII (2018), 79–83 (p. 79).

¹⁹ Litta, tav. VI; Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale (hereafter cited as: BNC), Poligrafo Gargani 1900, fols 145–46.

²⁰ Theodore Grasilier, ‘Notice biographique sur les évêques de Saintes’, in *Recueil des Actes, Archives et Mémoires de la Commission des Arts et monuments historiques de la Charente-Inférieure et Société d’Archéologie de Saintes* (Saintes, Imprimerie HUS, 1877), III, 222–23. This information is to be taken with caution.

²¹ Nicole Lemaître, ‘Les évêques italiens de François I^{er}’, in *François I^{er} et l’Italie/ Francesco I e l’Italia*, ed. by Jean-Marie Le Gall and Chiara Lastraioli (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 145–168 (p. 147).

²² For a good look at the French geography of power at the beginning of the sixteenth century and its use by Louise de Savoie and young Francis, see Pierre-Gilles Girault, ‘Séjours et résidences de Louise de Savoie en Val de Loire (1498–1518)’, in *Louise de Savoie (1476–1531)*, ed. by Pascal Briost, Laure Fagnart, and Cédric Michon (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015), pp. 47–60.

²³ Juan-Carlos d’Amico, ‘François I^{er} et les révoltes siciliennes’, in *François I^{er} et l’espace politique italien. États, domaines et territoires*, ed. by Juan-Carlos d’Amico

sent his nephew among his a few men in France to convince the king to support the conspiracy. The king had then interests in destabilising the south of the Italian peninsula, controlled indirectly by Emperor Charles V and where he had claims but had lost most of his assets.²⁴ The plot failed nearly immediately, and Francesco was imprisoned from 1522 to 1523. In France, it seems that Giuliano kept on working for his mission. The letters from the activity of this small group of agents (Giovann Battista Della Palla, Luigi Alamanni, Zanobi Buondelmonti, Giuliano Buonaccorsi) show that until January 1525 Giuliano constantly travelled between Paris, Lyon and Saintes.²⁵ Everything suggests that he did not return to Italy before his election as Florence's ambassador in July 1527. There, he would have most likely been under surveillance, even after his uncle was graced in September 1523.²⁶ Because of his anti-Medici political ideas, he was then an active member of the first network of Florentine exiles in France.²⁷

HOW TO REPRESENT A STATE IN CRISIS?

In July 1527, Soderini could be seen as Florence's best candidate to replace Acciaiuoli as resident ambassador in France. Indeed, he was already in France and benefited strong bonds with Republican exiles

et Jean-Louis Fournel (Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2018), pp. 263–88 (p. 280); Francesco Salvestrini, 'Soderini, Francesco', *DBI*, XCIII (2018), 61–64 (p. 63). About this conspiracy, see also Cesare Guasti, 'Documenti della congiura fatta contro il cardinale Giulio de' Medici', *Giornale storico degli archivi toscani*, 3–4 (1859), pp. 121–50 and 239–67.

²⁴ On these groups of agents, see Lorenzo Polizzotto, Caroline Elam, 'La unione de' gigli con gigli. Two documents on Florence, France and the Savonarolan Millenarian Tradition', *Rinascimento*, 31 (1991), 239–59; Caroline Elam, 'Art in the service of liberty: Battista della Palla, Art Agent for Francis I', *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 5 (1993), 33–109; Simoncelli, *Fuoruscitismo* I, pp. 15–38; Simonetta, pp. 197–202.

²⁵ Letters from G. Soderini to G.-B. Della Palla, 1 March 1523: Florence, Mediceo Avanti il Principato (hereafter cited as: MAP) 102, fol. 145; 27 December 1523: *ibid.*, fol. 150; 27 June 1524, *ibid.*, fol. 154; letter from L. Alamanni and Z. Buondelmonti to G.-B. Della Palla, 20 January 1525: *ibid.*, fol. 165; Guasti, pp. 199–201 and 252–54.

²⁶ Salvestrini, p. 63.

²⁷ Simoncelli, *Fuoruscitismo* I, pp. 15–38.

– now potential supports of the new government – beyond the Alps. Warned by the government of this election, Acciaiuoli – also driven by his strong wish to return to Italy – applauded this choice:

With the election of [Giuliano Soderini] I know the business of the city to stay within the care of a reputed and careful person, and pleasant to this Very Christian Majesty; and that it will be taken with a lot of ability and maturity of the council. And furthermore, I will be reassured to leave quickly than usual finding his person in court.²⁸

No evidence allows us to think that Soderini could have been a volunteer candidate. He must have learnt the decision of the Ten of Liberty and Peace – the name of the new Florentine government – receiving a letter sent from Florence on 11 July 1527.²⁹ He joined his predecessor in court in Amiens in the first days of August. This arrival opened an interesting period of transition. Acciaiuoli remained until his successor received his credentials: without those, he could be considered a representative of anything but himself.³⁰ But Acciaiuoli also stayed to put his successor on track. This transition had been conceived by Niccolò Capponi, head of the Florentine state, who had sent separately the notification of the election and one fold containing Soderini's credentials and instructions.³¹ The week or so that lasted this situation, Acciaiuoli was able to introduce his successor in court. Even more important, the former ambassador accepted to bequeath

²⁸ Letter from R. Acciaiuoli to the Ten, 6 August 1527: Florence, Archivio di Stato (hereafter cited as: AS), Otto di Pratica (hereafter cited as: OdP), Responsive 50, fols 130–32: 'Perché la electione di Sua Signoria cognosco le faccende della città restono in mano di persona reputata et prudente et grata a questa Maestà Christianissima; et che saranno portate con somma destreza et maturità di consiglio. Et oltre a questo el trovarsi la sua persona in corte mi darà sicurtà di soprastar quel meno'.

²⁹ Letter from the Ten to G. Soderini, 11 July 1527: Florence, AS, Dieci di Balìa (hereafter cited as: DdB), Legazioni e commissarie (hereafter cited as: Leg. e com.) 42, fols 27r–28v.

³⁰ Dante Fedele, *Naissance de la diplomatie moderne (XIIIe–XVIIe siècles): l'ambassadeur au croisement du droit, de l'éthique et de la politique* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017), p. 236; *Diplomatie et 'relations internationales' au Moyen Âge (IXe–XVe siècle)*, ed. by Jean-Marie Moeglin, Stéphane Péquignot (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2017), pp. 380–389.

³¹ *Négociations diplomatiques*, II, 994–97.

his secretary of embassy. Soderini had written at his arrival that he had not been assigned one and shall keep the one in place at his sight until another could be sent.³² If Acciaiuoli was helpful towards the needs of representation, it is the secretary who seems to have been the man of diplomatic continuity.³³ Acciaiuoli remained in France for several weeks, likely because he was unable to travel.³⁴ He was in Lyon, ready to return to Italy, on 1 October 1527.³⁵

Soderini's instructions were quite clear: he was in charge of assuring Francis I's military and financial support. Along with the constitution of the League of Cognac, whose precise put in order had been assured by Acciaiuoli, the king had promised to send men and supplies in Italy to fight against the Imperial troops. At the announcement of the sack of Rome, the king had given Odet de Foix, Viscount of Lautrec, the command of a large army to 'defend' Italy, from Milan to Naples.³⁶ However, the Florentine authorities, partly thanks to Acciaiuoli, had learned not to trust the king's good words and did not believe promises before concrete actions followed them. Acciaiuoli had become very clear on the matter when writing in early August 1527 to the Ten: 'you can hope on short term some strong provision, but their instability and small care of Italy as much as of their own interest make me doubt of its good execution'.³⁷ Rapidly, Soderini tried to inflect this mistrust,

³² Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 4 August 1527: Florence, OdP, Resp. 50, fol. 138v. On 30 August 1527, the Ten answered this request succinctly at the end of August: 'Quanto al secretario, Vostra Signoria si accomodi di quanto più desidera, che tale è la nostra intentione' (Florence, DdB, Leg. E com. 42, fol. 77v).

³³ For a recent update on the secretaries of embassy, see Pierre Nevejans, 'Le secrétaire d'ambassade, acteur indispensable de l'exercice diplomatique: le cas de Jacopo Guidi à la cour de France (1544–1545)', *Laboratoire Italien*, 23 (2019), online, DOI: 10.4000/laboratoireitalien.3678.

³⁴ Letter from R. Acciaiuoli to the Ten, 9–11 September 1527: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fol. 173v.

³⁵ Letter from R. Acciaiuoli to the Ten: *ibid.*, fol. 183.

³⁶ Jean-Marie Le Gall, 'Les princes italiens et François I^{er} (1515–1530)', in Le Gall, Lastraioli, pp. 107–129 (p. 126); Cédric Michon, 'Odet de Foix, vicomte de Lautrec (v. 1483–1528)', in *Les conseillers de François I^{er}*, ed. by Cédric Michon (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2011), pp. 265–72.

³⁷ Letter from R. Acciaiuoli to the Ten, 6 August 1527: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fols 130–32: 'si potessi sperare in breve tempo qualche gagliarda provisione, ma

leaning on his personal attachments to the French court. On October 1527, when Lautrec was in Lyon still gathering his army and supplies, the ambassador stated:

Since the affairs are so close that from here we cannot do anything now but trying from there with my lord Lautrec, to whom I have written as personal servant and friend, knowing him to be well disposed and, through the letters of the Most Christian King, very concerned about your Republic's wellness.³⁸

Soderini's reassuring tone responds directly to Florence's lack of safety and state of crisis. The Ten were afraid of being attacked and still trying desperately to seek peace with the Emperor in order to assure its own safety. In Florence, a part of the city was then convinced that peace could prevail in Italy, and ought to be negotiated with the Pope and the Emperor.³⁹ But they were also stuck in a worsening state of emergency. Then, Soderini's tendency to delay firm answers – because he could not get one from the French king – and to trust his interlocutors generated the Ten's mistrust towards their own ambassador. But this trust was a required bond between an agent and his mandant.⁴⁰ After a few months, the tone of the government tended to be less polite and to remind the dangers of this diplomatic game:

His Majesty [Charles V], who aspires to Monarchy, is obsessed with it, and it has to be believed that he employs all his power and strength to that matter; and I shall add that he might lose a kingdom if it would maintain him powerful in Italy, where he drew enormous means to continue warfare. You should consider that if

la instabilità loro et poca cura tengono non solo di Italia, ma di loro propria, mi fa dubitare di ogni buona executione'.

³⁸ Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 18 October 1527: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fol. 192: 'Pure essendo le cose sì propinque che di qua si può horamai in questa tanpoco non sarà se non bene tentare di là con monsignore Lautrec, al quale ho scripto come servitor et amico in particolare, cognoscendolo ben disposto et per le lettere del Re Christianissimo al bene della vostra Repubblica molto incitato'.

³⁹ Monti, p. 37.

⁴⁰ On this bond, see Daniela Frigo, 'Prudenza politica e conoscenza del mondo. Un secolo di riflessione sulla figura dell'ambasciatore (1541–1643)', in *De l'ambassadeur : Les écrits relatifs à l'ambassadeur et à l'art de négocier du Moyen Âge au début du XIXe siècle*, ed. by Stefano Andretta, Stéphane Péquignot, and Jean-Claude Waquet (Rome: Publications de l'École française de Rome, 2016), pp. 227–68 (pp. 255–56).

you deprive this Majesty of all Italy, there would only last a king of Romans. And he would be forced to come to any agreement that would please you, as we wrote to you already, opinion to which here we have always been in favour.⁴¹

Representing a state in crisis, furthermore taken in an inconstant situation inside and outside of its own territory, could be nothing but a challenge for an envoy. For Soderini, this problem emerged along with his incapacity to improvise nor anticipate the decisions of his senders. He explained his difficulties with his refusal to negotiate without having received precise intelligence and specific instructions. Quickly he complained about being very isolated. On 18 October 1527, he confessed having to go through his brother Tommaso to get information on Italian events.⁴² A few weeks after, he claimed not having received news for several weeks. But he did not want to believe that, considering the situation of extreme necessity in which Florence was, the Ten could have forgotten him.⁴³ At a certain point, this situation of incertitude had greatly damaged his image towards many French officials. They were all surprised to see him so misinformed. This lack of news would have made him a useless and mocked interlocutor at the French court.⁴⁴

Soderini was not the first, nor the last, to write this kind of complaints in his diplomatic correspondence. The lack of news was very common for Renaissance ambassadors, insofar as they operated far away from their own state. Most of the time, they had to pretend to be well informed or to deal with the incertitude mentioned above. Being able

⁴¹ Letter from the Ten to G. Soderini, 16 April 1528: Florence, AS, DdB, Leg. e Com. 44, fol. 53: 'Sua Maestà che aspira alla Monarchia non pensa a altro, et si debbe credere che tutto il potere et le forze sue ha appore in questo; et aggiunto che si vede perder un regno che era caso di mantenerlo in Italia possente, donde cavava grosse facultà per mantenere la guerra. Cotesta Maestà dovrieno considerare che, privandolo del tutto di Italia, non resterà se non un Re de' Romani. Et sarà forzato venire ad ogni accordo che verrà loro bene, come vi s'è scripto, da un tempo in qua noi siamo stati sempre di questa opinione'.

⁴² Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 18 October 1527: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fol. 192. About Tommaso Soderini, see Raffaella Zaccaria, 'Soderini, Tommaso', *DBI*, XCIII (2018), 89–92.

⁴³ Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 24 November 1527: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fol. 207.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

to neither improvise nor anticipate his masters' needs was a required skill for ambassadors.⁴⁵ Furthermore, in this precise case, the Ten sent Soderini a few letters a month at least, when they did not write several letters within a few days. It is true that most of those dispatches, which are preserved as copies, were filled with raw information (*avvisi*) and lack precise instructions. But it was precisely the role of the ambassador to interpret this intelligence provided to constitute a coherent diplomatic line and negotiate.⁴⁶ There, Soderini showed his limits and lack of formation: even if he benefited the initial location and enlarged networks in France, he had never fulfilled a proper diplomatic mission. The sensitive Florentine embassy in France, especially at a time of deep crisis for Florence and strong expectations from France, could have been above his limits.

WHEN A 'MULTITUDE OF ACTORS' IMPEACHED AMBASSADORS⁴⁷

Nevertheless, despite his limitations and lack of formation, Soderini's embassy could not be described as useless nor failed. Firstly, diplomacy cannot be seen in terms of 'success' and 'failure'. Most of the time, the simple fact of preserving relations between the two states was already a victory.⁴⁸ Furthermore, some ambassadors could be instructed to fail or to break off diplomatic relations. Then, which would appear at first sight as a failure could be, considering their initial instructions, quite a success.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Moëglin, Péquignot, pp. 637–639; Matthieu Gellard, 'La circulation des correspondances d'État en Europe durant le second XVI^e siècle. L'exemple de la France', in *La Poste, servante et actrice des relations internationales (XVI^e–XIX^e siècle)*, ed. by Alexandre Tessier (Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2016), pp. 23–34 (p. 24).

⁴⁶ Fedele, pp. 565–85.

⁴⁷ The expression was borrowed by Birgit Tremml-Werner and Dorothee Goetze, 'A Multitude of Actors in Early Modern Diplomacy', *Journal of Early Modern History*, 23 (2019), 407–22.

⁴⁸ Daniela Frigo, 'Politica e diplomazia. I sentieri della storiografia italiana', in *Sulla diplomazia*, pp. 35–59 (p. 38).

⁴⁹ Lucien Bély, 'Histoire de la diplomatie et des relations internationales des Temps modernes: un état de la recherche en France', in *Sulla diplomazia*, pp. 19–34 (p. 21).

Giuliano Soderini had been instructed to negotiate the sending of wheat from France to Florence. These imports were meant to be numerous and regular. Indeed, Florence's main issue in 1527 was to provide its wheat supply. Since the beginning of the century, Italy – apart from Sicily – increasingly relied on grain imports.⁵⁰ Florence made no exception. The revolution had increased even this dependency: the city could no longer rely on the few imports from its territory, which was subject to instability and local pro-Medici revolutions.⁵¹ In this context, Soderini's task had become essential: France was able to sell huge quantities of wheat. Since the beginning of his embassy, Soderini had worked on obtaining wheat exports. Nevertheless, after a first sell in the very first weeks of his embassy, his demands began to be rejected by the king: 'About the new wheat negotiation, I talked to his Majesty the King, who answered that if from this country there would be some [grain] left, he would concede its benefit to your country as he would do for his own'.⁵² Paradoxically, Florentine demands could no longer be fulfilled rightly because of the same Florentine demands. While Lautrec was preparing his army to defend the 'Liberty of Italy', he had to gather provisions to be able to feed his men. Because of these preparations, new imports could not be negotiated in fall 1527. Soderini, from the French court, had understood this subtlety of his action ('it seems to me that for now, we should content of such a promise'⁵³).

Soderini did not waive. At the beginning of December, considering that Lautrec was collecting wheat in Provence, usual region of grain supply for Florence, he decided to look for grain in different regions, using his connections with merchants settled in Lyon, 'because from

⁵⁰ Guido Alfani, *Calamities and the Economy in Renaissance Italy. The Grand Tour of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (New York: MacMillan, 2013), pp. 70–78.

⁵¹ Information confessed by N. Capponi in a letter to G. Soderini, 18 November 1528: *Négociations diplomatiques*, II, 1007; Monti, p. 47.

⁵² Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 18 October 1527: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fol. 192: 'Circa la nuova tracta de' grani se ne è parlato alla maestà del re, quale ha fatto per risposta che se di quel paese non se ne è cavato tanto che non sia troppo exhaust, si concederà a beneficio del paese vostro quanto si farebbe per il suo medesimo'.

⁵³ Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 18 October 1527: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fol. 192.

those places there is hope to be able to quarry as much as we would like'.⁵⁴ But in mid-winter, it was almost impossible to buy such amounts of provisions. The ambassador had to wait for May before being able to obtain a new sending. He used his usual contacts in France, including G.-B. Della Palla, one of the former agents of his uncle.⁵⁵ But the promise remained virtual.

The Florentine government had anticipated Soderini's incapacity to negotiate with the king. As soon as August 1527, the Ten attached Anton Francesco degli Albizzi as ambassador to Lautrec.⁵⁶ This second agent could inform directly about the army's actions, quicker than the ambassador from France could do, simply for metric reasons. This solution could be rightly provided because Lautrec had been granted plenipotentiary powers by Francis I, placing him as a 'second king' in Italy.⁵⁷ Furthermore, Albizzi was, contrarily to Soderini, a trusted servitor of the Republic. He shared the same anti-Medici curriculum but could brag from having served the Republic from and in Italy since the first days of the revolution.⁵⁸ He had been appointed co-envoy to Pisa in May to restore the Florentine authority upon the city (Pisa was an essential piece with Livorno to supply Florence). He had also been involved in June in the election of Niccolò Capponi as *gonfaloniere*.⁵⁹

Albizzi intended to work in good intelligence with Soderini also from the beginning when he wrote: 'To the bishop of Saintes I've written every week, and will continue to do so'.⁶⁰ But he also intended to compel his mission. Whether Soderini could describe nothing but his ability to rely blindly on the king's promises, Albizzi quickly stated that Lautrec 'may

⁵⁴ Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 6 December 1527: *ibid.*, fols 212–13r.

⁵⁵ Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 15 May 1528: *ibid.*, fol. 268.

⁵⁶ *Négociations diplomatiques*, II, pp. 991–993.

⁵⁷ Situation analogue to the one of his government upon Milan. See Philippa Woodcock, 'Living like a king? The entourage of Odet de Foix, vicomte de Lautrec, governor of Milan', *Royal Studies Journal*, 2 (2015), 1–24.

⁵⁸ Nicholas Scott-Baker, *The Fruit of Liberty. Political Culture in the Florentine Renaissance, 1480–1550* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 100; Monti, p. 29.

⁵⁹ Alberto Merola, 'Albizzi, Anton Francesco', *DBI*, II (1960), 18–20.

⁶⁰ Letter from A.F. Degli Albizzi to the Ten, 30 October 1527: Florence, AS, DdB, Resp. 125, fol. 276r.

be easy to persuade', and that he was 'already working on many persons, [...] not restraining myself to few particulars'.⁶¹ Like Acciaiuoli a few months before, he warned the Ten about the impossibility to trust the king's promises, considering this would not change until the Emperor would accept to free the king's sons.⁶² By doing so, he confirmed the Ten's mistrust and discredited Soderini's calls for hope. The first weeks of Albizzi's mission and his ability to gather information both from France and Italy tended to diminish the need of an ambassador at the court of Francis I. Lautrec as a plenipotentiary lieutenant could make a decision the king seemed not to wish to; Albizzi judged Lautrec reliable and 'easy to persuade'. However, Soderini could not show progress in his negotiations with France, mainly because Francis I considered he had done his utmost by sending Lautrec in Italy with a gigantic army.⁶³ For months, Albizzi had short-cut, most likely unwillingly, Soderini's action.

Lautrec's presence in Italy and the hope for his help comforted the Ten at the prospect of a looming war.⁶⁴ Starting from the idea that the king of France neither could nor would do more, the Ten were then trying to convince King Henry VIII of England to finance an army in Italy.⁶⁵ These attempts were known to Soderini, who had tried himself to convince his government to elect as ambassador to England Roberto Nasi, a member of the Florentine nation in Paris.⁶⁶ But the Ten thought that it would be more efficient to use Albizzi as an intermediary to reach the English envoys presents in Lautrec's camp.⁶⁷ Once again, Soderini was marginalised.

The situation could have turned in his favour when the French army failed to conquer the south and was decimated by the plague.⁶⁸

⁶¹ Letter from A.F. Degli Albizzi to the Ten, 28 November 1527: *ibid.*, fol. 421.

⁶² Letter from A.F. Degli Albizzi to the Ten, 7 November 1527: *ibid.*, fol. 449v.

⁶³ Didier Le Fur, *François Ier* (Paris: Perrin, 2015), pp. 444–47.

⁶⁴ Monti, pp. 38–41.

⁶⁵ On these negotiations with England, see Cecil Roth, 'England and the Last Florentine Republic (1527–1530)', *The English Historical Review*, 158 (1925), 174–95.

⁶⁶ Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 18 October 1527: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fols 191–92.

⁶⁷ Roth, p. 177.

⁶⁸ This plague touched all Italy. On the Florentine situation, see John Henderson, *Florence under Siege: Surviving Plague in an Early Modern City* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2019).

Lautrec himself succumbed in front of Naples in Mid-August 1528.⁶⁹ Lautrec's death and the military rout annihilated Albizzi's action. It also obliged Niccolò Capponi to return to Soderini, so that he could convince the king to nominate a 'good chief' for the French army in Italy.⁷⁰ Simultaneously, the Ten began to understand that, in keeping with Soderini's constant warnings, war with the Imperials was inevitable and would turn into a siege of the city.⁷¹ To sustain the siege, the city needed a huge amount of provisions. It was a key factor in the Florentine rebellion's long-term victory, as the Florentine head of state Niccolò Capponi warned in a letter to Soderini:

If Your Lordship does not win the wheat negotiation, we will starve to death, and Your Lordship would have not only participated but would also be responsible. Since last year quite an amount was negotiated, and that we will not be able to make provisions within the next days, and that this year already they have won 400 bushels of oats and rye, conducted to Livorno, and that we are leagued and spend a treasure, we are surprised that many of our needs cannot be satisfied. It is a great matter, because the harvests are in great part captured and the countryside suffered from the past food shortages so much that we lack greatly from it, and cannot get [grain] from anywhere else. That is why Your Lordship should consider the disorders which could follow.⁷²

This letter was found among the letters of French government officials preserved in Paris. Soderini may have given it to one of them to call for distress and urge the conclusion of the expected wheat import. To his

⁶⁹ Monti, p. 42; Michon, 'Odet de Foix', p. 272.

⁷⁰ Letter from N. Capponi to G. Soderini, 24 August 1528: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereafter cited as: BnF), MS fr 3021, fol. 68r.

⁷¹ Monti, p. 44.

⁷² Letter from N. Capponi to G. Soderini, 24 August 1528: Paris, BnF, MS fr. 3021, fol. 68r: 'se la Signoria Vostra non obtiene la tracta de' grani noi ci morreno di fame, et la Signoria Vostra non solo harà grado, ma ne harà charicho. Atteso che l'anno passato ne fu tracto qualche somma et noi non potremmo trarre entri se non pochi giorni sono, et questo anno di già hanno tracto 400 moggie tra biade et sogola, et condottole a Livorno, et noi che siamo in legha et spendiamo uno thesoro, ci pare strano in tanti nostri bisogni non essere accommodati. Questa cosa importa grandemente, perché le ricolte sono stati tanti capitivi et el paese voto delle charestie passate che ne habbiamo manchamento grande, et d'altrove non ne possiamo cavare. Però consideri la Signoria Vostra che disordini ne possi seguire'.

masters, the ambassador answered by quoting the king: the city should prepare its walls and hope for the bad weather to prevent the Imperial troops from gathering as quickly as predicted.⁷³ Besides, as the news of Lautrec's death, Soderini, who had warned multiple times about the necessity to prepare to war, also started then to speak about peace and general conciliation.⁷⁴

The incapacity to obtain wheat supply from France, the rout of the French army in Italy, the impossibility to earn any promise from England and Soderini's unexplainable behaviour led to the sending of a new agent in France. This time, it was chosen among Florentine insiders: Lotheri Gherardi was mandated in September 1528, a few days after Capponi's warning to Soderini.⁷⁵ His instructions were to express Florence's distress and almost complete inability to defend itself. The idea was literally to beg Francis for help. Gherardi's presence in France, albeit his status of 'simple' agent,⁷⁶ confirms the mistrust resented towards Soderini by his government. However, such a concomitance of diplomatic presence could be common in Florentine practices. Biagio Buonaccorsi, a secretary of the embassy for Francesco Soderini when he was Florentine ambassador in France, had already conducted a role in the control of the diplomatic action there both during and after the embassy.⁷⁷ The status of plenipotentiary ambassador meant a concentration of power in a single individual, and therefore the capacity to serve as well as to betray.⁷⁸ When ambassadors seemed to wave from service

⁷³ Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 23 September 1528: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fols 362–63.

⁷⁴ Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 30 August 1528: *ibid.*, fol. 332.

⁷⁵ We do not know much about him, except that he was a member of an influent republican family. After his mission in France, he was charged to defend Prato (Monti, pp. 168–71).

⁷⁶ On the concept of 'agent', see *Your Humble Servant*, pp. 9–16.

⁷⁷ Emanuele Cutinelli-Rendina and Denis Fachard, 'Introduzione', in Luca d'Antonio degli Albizzi and Francesco Soderini, *Legazione alla corte di Francia. 31 agosto 1501 – 10 luglio 1502* (Turin: Nino Aragno, 2015), pp. vii–xxxvii (pp. xvi–xxii).

⁷⁸ Bruno Figliolo, 'Pratiche e norme di comportamento nella diplomazia italiana', in *De l'ambassadeur*, pp. 113–61 (p. 130); Fedele, p. 583. This is also true during the Medicean Principate: see Alessandra Contini, 'Correre la fortuna di Cesare. Instabilità, diplomazia ed informazione politica nel principato di Cosimo I', in

to betrayal, they were considered as potentially incapable of fulfilling their task.⁷⁹ Here, Soderini presented the ideal profile to be considered both Florentine *and* French. It is interesting to notice that, in his letters, he speaks of ‘your city’ or ‘your Republic’, using the second person pronoun and not the first.⁸⁰ He had not shown himself in Florence for years, and had no intention to go back to Italy. When he first asked for his dismissal, he wrote that he wished to celebrate the Easter mass in his bishopric of Saintes.⁸¹ Furthermore, Soderini’s writing ought to be understood in a global context of Florentine mistrust towards the old aristocracy, which was then seen as volatile and acting solely for its own interests. This tendency to exclude aristocrats from affairs increased as the supporters and members of the revolution radicalised.⁸²

Gherardi’s sending and the conformity of his instructions with those of Soderini tend to suggest that the Florentine government indeed mistrusted the ambassador. However, Gherardi rapidly understood the ambassador’s difficulties to negotiate with the French, stating explicitly that no one there cared about Italy, Lautrec’s rout having convinced them definitely the peninsula could no longer be recovered from the Emperor.⁸³ Gherardi nevertheless obtained new promises from the king: a new army, led by the count of Saint-Pol, would gather 10,000 infantrymen and 1,500 lansquenets, financed thanks to a grant of 20,000 *écus*.⁸⁴ These results had been expected for months by the Ten, who had

L'Italia di Carlo V: guerra, religione e politica nel primo Cinquecento, ed. by Francesca Cantù, Elena Fasano Guarini, and Maria Antonietta Visceglia (Rome: Viella, 2003), pp. 391–410 (pp. 391–93).

⁷⁹ Julien Guinand, Pierre Nevejans, ‘Introduction’, in *La fortune de l'entre-deux. Capitaines, ambassadeurs et prélats italiens entre Valois et Habsbourg, des Alpes à Venise (1519–1559)*, workshop organised in Lyon (France), 22 October 2019, forthcoming.

⁸⁰ Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 6 December 1527: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fols 212–13r; 27 June 1528: *ibid.*, fols 294–96r; 2 July 1528: *ibid.*, fols 306–07. This linguistic subtlety, which could only be analysed through a complete transcription of the text, does not decrease along the embassy.

⁸¹ Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 2 April 1528: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fols 235–36.

⁸² Cecchi, pp. 9–10.

⁸³ Letter from L. Gherardi to the Ten, 5 October 1528: Florence, AS, DdB, Resp. 133, fol. 165.

⁸⁴ Letter from L. Gherardi to the Ten, 27 October 1528: Florence, *ibid.*, fol. 171v.

already asked Soderini on 16 April 1528 to obtain several thousand men reinforcement for Lautrec's army, considering that a substantial loss of its troops – in battle or of disease – would be the first step to a large-scale rout.⁸⁵

Soderini's case shows the risks of entertaining multidirectional diplomacy, conducted by different layers of diplomatic agents. It confirms the most recent statements on the matter: defining early modern diplomatic actors as a 'heterogeneous group' stresses the capacity of governments to adapt pragmatically to any situation.⁸⁶ The situation mentioned above forms one of these early modern nebulas, where different agents were representing the same political entity at the same time, but in different places and modalities. This 'primary network'⁸⁷ owed its existence to the situation of extreme emergency in which Florence was stuck in 1527–29. It was built as events were modifying the situation in Italy and the Florentine ability to survive its own revolution. But it also generated – or at least, worsened – Soderini's inability to be efficient on the French ground. Considering Florence's desperate situation, the first months of Soderini's activity in France were essential in the definition of his potential use for the republic. But this desperation also seems to have been at the origin of a profound incapacity to demonstrate any patience towards the ambassador's efforts and promises.

A MISTRUSTED AMBASSADOR FOR A DIPLOMATIC DIVERSION

Without going on the slippery slope of measuring the failure or success of an embassy,⁸⁸ the constant capacity of the Ten, even in a state of crisis and urgent necessity, to anticipate their ambassador's incapacity to act tends to suggest that not only he was not meant to succeed but not to be able to do anything. Soderini was efficient in France for providing information and therefore acted within a diplomatic frame (considering

⁸⁵ Letter from the Ten to G. Soderini, 16 April 1528: Florence, AS, DdB, Leg. e com. 44, fol. 53.

⁸⁶ Tremml-Werner and Goetze, p. 408.

⁸⁷ *Your Humble Servant*, p. 14.

⁸⁸ Bély, p. 21.

that diplomacy relied on three activities, which are negotiation, information gathering and representation⁸⁹). But, if we see diplomacy as a global and flexible activity, and think in terms of negotiation and representation, it appears that he was almost immediately, after a few weeks, replaced and bypassed by Albizzi through the possibility to negotiate directly with Lautrec. After a few months, his task as the wheat supplier was fulfilled in a few days by a simple agent, who confirmed the difficulties endured by the ambassador but actually did the work.

At first sight, Soderini might have been chosen because of his potential efficiency. But this 'ideal profile' could also be interpreted differently: he may have been a harmless candidate for a mission impossible to fulfil. Considering French politics and Franco-Florentine relations since the beginning of the Italian Wars, his embassy could indeed be seen as an impossible task.⁹⁰ Looking at his embassy carefully, contextualising it and seeing this single ambassador acting within a dozen actors' game, we are tempted to see him more as a kind of diversion.

Before Lautrec's arrival in Italy, Florence could not afford to abandon its representation in France. France was then an old ally. The Savonarolian tradition that inspired the *Arrabiati* – party up to power with the republican revolution – favoured a Francophile foreign policy.⁹¹ This policy was built after the king of France had provoked the first chase of the Medici in 1494, as described by Francesco Guicciardini in his *Storia d'Italia*.⁹² The Florentine new government in 1527 had no interest in breaking this tradition. In this diplomatic context and considering the Florentine's issues to defend and supply the city, cutting off the diplomatic representation in France would have sent an undesirable message to the French authorities, rightly at a moment of diplomatic indecision in Italy and redefinition of alliances between Valois and

⁸⁹ Fedele, pp. 565–81.

⁹⁰ Jean-Louis Fournel, 'Machiavel, Guicciardini et François I^{er}', in *François I^{er} et l'espace politique italien*, pp. 155–76; Magali Flessia, 'Le langage diplomatique: dire et écrire, convaincre et agir. Les lettres de Piero Soderini et Cosimo dei Pazzi en France (1498–1499) Édition critique et commentée' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Aix-Marseille, 2013).

⁹¹ Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: the Savonarolan movement in Florence (1494–1545)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 44.

⁹² Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia* (Bari: G. Laterza, 1967), I, 194–97 (I, 7).

Habsburgs.⁹³ Soderini's mission was above all to preserve Acciaiuoli's legacy, that is to say, the existence of the League of Cognac and the king's promise to defend the liberty of Italy. It was very classical for a Florentine foreign policy: Florentine officials had abandoned the original sense of peace to join the idea of permanent but protean war.⁹⁴ But it was also well-known and confirmed that the French embassy constituted an undoable task, the only 'success' which might prevail being the preservation of relations. Florentine envoys had often repeated this statement in France from the beginning of the Italian Wars. Multiple embassies there had encountered difficulties. Niccolò Machiavelli and Francesco della Casa, sent to the court of Louis XII at the eve of the sixteenth century, had been confronted to the impossibility to come to a formal agreement, mainly because they suffered the silence of their own government when it came to officialise a treaty.⁹⁵ In 1501, Giuliano's uncle Francesco had been confronted with the same situation, even though he was an experienced diplomat.⁹⁶ Giuliano, twenty-five years later and in a comparable situation, could not brag about such an experience: he had witnessed some diplomatic encounters in the middle of the 1510s, played the role of a subaltern agent for his uncle in France, but this was his first mission as an official ambassador. Considering the past relations and this lack of experience, it seems reasonable to state that his mission could have been meant not to success. It would explain why the Ten chose a man who was indeed an old member of the anti-Medici networks, but also a man who had left Italy for years and who had never volunteered to represent Florence in France. His *etiquette* of being an 'in-between' actor of Italian politics was not an advantage when looking for a strong, efficient and clear diplomatic agent. Then, we might get to the conclusion that Soderini was only meant to gain some time while Albizzi was negotiating with Lautrec, judged easier to practice than the unstable king of France. This strategy

⁹³ Pellegrini, pp. 178–83.

⁹⁴ Romain Descendre, Jean-Louis Fournel, and Jean-Claude Zancarani, 'Après les Guerres d'Italie: Florence, Venise, Rome (1530–1605)', *Astériorion*, 15 (2016), online, DOI: 10.4000/asterion.2802.

⁹⁵ Cutinelli-Rendina and Fachard, pp. xiv–xv.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

was repeated at the death of Lautrec when Lorenzo Martelli was sent to represent Florence towards Saint-Pol, the new leader of the also new French army in Italy.⁹⁷

Soderini noticed several times his own difficulties to fulfil his instructions, even if he tried to hide those behind his trust in the French king. Quickly, he despaired in front of his impossible task and understood, by entertaining an important correspondence with Albizzi, that he had been bypassed. From April 1528, he seems to have given up the idea of fulfilling his tasks and started to ask repeatedly for his dismissal.⁹⁸

His successor, Baldassare Carducci, was elected at the beginning of November and received his instructions on 2 December 1528.⁹⁹ He was a significant candidate for the task: after a career in law, he had been involved in the first anti-Medici revolution, serving the *gonfaloniere* Piero Soderini (second uncle of Giuliano). He had then been chosen to justify the alliance with France in front of the Imperial army, obviously, a delicate task that showed his command of diplomatic language and belonging to the Francophile line.¹⁰⁰ After fifteen years of exile in Venice, he had returned to Florence, where he had been appointed among the Ten of Peace in June 1528.¹⁰¹ Carducci arrived in France in January 1529. As it had been planned in 1527 when Soderini settled in the place of Acciaiuoli, their mutual instructions organised this period of transition. But Soderini's position in 1529 towards Carducci seems quite different from the one Acciaiuoli had chosen to undertake in 1527. He confirmed having welcomed his successor in Paris but also confessed that the day after his arrival and presentation to the king, he himself chose to step aside and let Carducci do the job immediately.¹⁰² This retirement is not a surprise on a legal level, considering that his own mission had theoretically stopped when Carducci had shown his

⁹⁷ Monti, p. 50, n. 115.

⁹⁸ Letter from G. Soderini to the Ten, 28 August 1528: Florence, AS, OdP, Resp. 50, fols 330–31r.

⁹⁹ *Négociations*, II, 1029–032.

¹⁰⁰ Paolo Malanima, 'Carducci, Baldassare', *DBI*, XX (1977), 2–6.

¹⁰¹ Florence, AS, DdB, Leg. e Com. 44, fol. 163r.

¹⁰² Letter from G. Soderini and B. Carducci, 1 February 1529: Florence, AS, DdP, Resp. 127, fol. 422r.

credentials to the king of France. But Soderini also chose the moment to explain his vision of Italian diplomacy and the Florentine place in this complex chessboard. According to him, the ideal situation for Florence would be to sit 'in-between', neither in a state of peace nor in a state of war. The strategy that consisted in confronting the Imperial troops on the Italian soil would have been a mistake: the confederates would have better done to send men in Spain and destabilise Charles V at the heart of his Empire. After the sending of Lautrec and Saint-Pol, Florence ought not to hope anything from France, the situation there could not lead to anything but to the peace with the Emperor.¹⁰³ This final *ragionamento* is interesting: it contrasts strongly with the ambassador's hope and positive attitude shown along with his mission. At the end of his mission, cynicism and resentment had finally torn him down. In the same letter, Carducci added a few lines, defending Soderini's place, action and reputation within the French court ('Io deferisca a Sua Signoria Reverendissima, et osservi le vestigie di quella come di huomo in questa corte certamente raro et di credito et reputatione non mediocre'¹⁰⁴). For a couple of weeks, Carducci relied on Soderini's professionalism and sense of duty, even though the former ambassador wanted to be released from his burden. Soderini kept on collaborating with Carducci, in particular by giving him every single document he received when his correspondents could not yet be aware that he was no longer ambassador.¹⁰⁵

MEMBER OF THE FLORENTINE EXILES CIRCLES

This situation lasted a few weeks, and it seems that Soderini decided to stay in Paris to facilitate the transition. Della Palla, the one-off agent for the Ten in February–March 1529, cited him as being still in Paris on 31 March.¹⁰⁶ He then must have packed to return to his bishopric

¹⁰³ Letter from G. Soderini and B. Carducci, 1 February 1529: *ibid.*, fol. 422–423.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from G. Soderini and B. Carducci, 1 February 1529: *ibid.*, fol. 423.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from B. Carducci to the Ten, 14 February 1529: *ibid.*, fol. 289.

¹⁰⁶ Letter from G.-B. Della Palla to the Dieci, 31 March 1529: Florence, AS, DdB, Resp. 126, fol. 382r.

in Saintes.¹⁰⁷ He returned to Italy in 1535–36 when some Florentine exiles representatives went to meet the Emperor in Naples to ask for Alessandro de' Medici's – nominated to rule upon Florence in 1530 – dismiss.¹⁰⁸ He helped the exiles to gather funds and charges as legate in the Marches in 1536. But he was also ready to abandon Florence to the Medici when Cosimo de' Medici was elected lord of the city in January 1537.¹⁰⁹ He may have come back to France in 1537. From 1537 onwards, and regularly, he welcomed his nephew Lorenzino de' Medici – assassin of Alessandro – during his years of exile, and followed the adventures of the Florentine exiles in France.¹¹⁰ Without a deeper work on their activities in France during this period, it is hard to qualify his precise role in these networks.¹¹¹ In January 1541, he was in Saintes with his nephew; the information remained important enough to be reported by the papal nuncio in France.¹¹² Still in 1541, from France, he yielded a Florentine canonicate he had been invested in 1510 to his grand-nephew Giovan Battista.¹¹³ On 10 March 1544, he wrote a letter to Piero Strozzi from Saintes, with much shakier handwriting than the one he had in the 1520s.¹¹⁴ Certainly ill, he was replaced in his

¹⁰⁷ He was still there in 1532, when a revolt forced him to beg the king for help (*Catalogue des actes de François I^{er}* [Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1892], V, 701).

¹⁰⁸ Letter from J. du Bellay and C. Hémard de Denonville to Francis I, 22 December 1535: Paris, BnF, MS fr 5499, fol. 272r; letter from G. Soderini to Filippo Strozzi, 24 April 1536: Florence: AS, Carte strozziane, series V, 1207, fol. 199r. On the Medicean restoration, see Rouchon, 'L'invenzione del Principato'.

¹⁰⁹ Simoncelli, *Fuoruscitismo* I, pp. 113, 148, 211; Giorgio Spini, *Cosimo I e l'indipendenza del principato mediceo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1980), pp. 36, 46.

¹¹⁰ Stefano Dall'Aglío, *The Duke's Assassin: Exile and Death of Lorenzino de' Medici* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2015), p. 82. Lorenzino de' Medici was the son of Maria Soderini, Giuliano's sister.

¹¹¹ Some elements are offered in Paolo Simoncelli, *La Repubblica fiorentina in esilio. Una storia segreta*, vol. 1: *La speranza della restaurazione della Repubblica* (Rome: Nuova Cultura, 2018). Stefano Dall'Aglío considers Soderini's death in 1544 as one of the main reasons Lorenzino's departure from France (Dall'Aglío, p. 82).

¹¹² Letter from G. Dandino to A. Farnese, 10 January 1541: *Correspondance des nonces en France. Capodiferro, Dandino et Giudiccione (1541–1546)* (Rome, Paris: Presses de l'Université Grégorienne, E. de Boccard, 1963), p. 26.

¹¹³ Florence, BNC, Poligrafo Gargani, 1900, fols 118, 145.

¹¹⁴ Letter from G. Soderini to Piero Strozzi, 10 March 1544: Florence, Carte strozziane, series V, 1210, I, fol. 25.

bishopric by Charles de Bourbon-Vendôme in January 1544. Everything suggests that he died on 30 July 1544 in his bishopric.¹¹⁵ The funeral monument built in his honour in the cathedral of Saint Peter in Saintes may have been destroyed during the wars of religion.¹¹⁶ This death in Saintes, far from the usual places frequented by Florentines, explains the dispersion of his papers.¹¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Soderini's embassy in France allows the historian to reverse his first opinion on the social reasons that would have prevailed to the election of a representative. The bishop of Saintes must have been considered not a potentially efficient agent, but a lesser loss for a mission that could neither be aborted nor fulfilled. His election allowed the Ten to save a more important man in Italy, using a secondary man beyond the Alps. This political strategy had massive consequences on the ambassador's action. Soderini was short-cut by other agents presents on the field in Italy, sometimes also in France under his nose. His bitterness when leaving the court of France reveals that he had understood the strategy behind his official mission. As an ambassador, Soderini was isolated from both the French court and the Florentine government. His 'in-betweenness', which could have been an opportunity to play on

¹¹⁵ Litta wrote that Soderini was back to Rome, where he would have lived until his death in 1554. He would have waited there to be created cardinal, but wouldn't have been because of the opposition of Cosimo de' Medici (Litta, tav. VI). Litta statement is based on Gargani's collection of information (Florence, BNC, Poligrafo Gargani, 1900, fol. 145). Gargani's information was based on Salvini, *Catalogo cronologico de' canonici della Chiesa metropolitana Fiorentina* (Florence: 1782), p. 71. The same polygraph gives other information according to which Soderini died in 1544. Giuliano would have been dead 'three years ago' in 1548; his natural son, Giuliano di Piero, would have inherited his patrimony (Florence, BNC, Poligrafo Gargani, 1900, fol. 147). Other information matches the 1544 death: 'Julianus Soderin', in *Gallia christiana*, II, 1082; *Storia dei Vescovi Vicentini* (Vicenza: 1786), p. 190; Grasilier, p. 222; Dall'Aglia, p. 82.

¹¹⁶ Robert Favreau *et al.*, *La cathédrale Saint-Pierre de Saintes* (Paris: Picard, 2012).

¹¹⁷ It is unlikely that they could be still in the bishopric archives, considering they were severely purged when the bishopric was transferred to La Rochelle in the seventeenth century.

both sides, begun his main issue. He was considered neither a French nor a Florentine, and therefore seen as a useless representative to the interests of a nation which did not consider him as one of his owns. His mission suffered from many circumstantial elements and from the state of emergency that ruled Florence. The short-term Florentine needs forced the Ten to draw diplomacy of diversion towards France, which they could only bet to succeed. An ambassador for a diversion could only be a working strategy if another agent could negotiate from another ground. There were the dangers of multidirectional diplomacy: one axe could only depend on the other.

ANNEX

Catalogue of Giuliano Soderini's correspondence (July 1527 – February 1529)

The initial goal of this paper was to offer to readers some letters from Soderini's *carteggio*. On second thoughts, this would have been misleading in selecting letters and pretending them to be either representative or, worse, 'interesting' (on which basis could a letter be considered as such?).¹¹⁸ It would have led to the reproduction of Desjardins and Canestrini's editorial practices, practices that have provoked the relative ignorance upon Soderini's mission in France. Then, in order to overcome the past's mistakes without reproducing its most criticisable flaws,¹¹⁹ it has been decided to provide not a sample of this *carteggio*, but a simple catalogue of its composition. In order to facilitate the work of scholars who would be interested in digging this one case-study, this catalogue was built on the document's precise location (city, institution, fond, pagination).

Most of Soderini's letters are kept after Acciaiuoli's in the State Archive of Florence's fond 'Otto di Pratica'. Readers ought not to misunderstand about the recipients' identity of these letters: they were indeed sent to the 'Dieci di Pace e di Libertà', the *indirizzo* on the back of each letter proving it. Soderini's letters from January to March 1528 are still missing. Copies of the letters sent to him are kept in the part 'Legazioni e commissarie' of the fond 'Dieci di Balia', still in Florence's State Archive. The originals were lost with the personal papers of Soderini.

In the current state of research, more than 220 letters sent or received by Giuliano Soderini from July 1527 to February 1529 have been catalogued. This amount includes about twenty unfound, but mentioned along the correspondence. They mainly concern letters from January to March 1528. It would be impossible to claim this catalogue to be exhaustive. It must be understood as a working tool to be completed. Letters from Soderini could be found in the papers of any of his contacts, whose list is still to determine (if such a thing is feasible).

¹¹⁸ Robert Halsband, 'Editing the Letters of Letter-Writers', *Studies in Bibliography*, 11 (1958), 25–37 (p. 26); Francesco Senatore, 'Filologia e buon senso nelle edizioni di corrispondenze diplomatiche italiane quattrocentesche', *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medioevo*, 110 (2008), 61–95 (p. 72–76).

¹¹⁹ Halsband, p. 25.

Abbreviations:

AS	– Archivio di Stato, Florence
BNC	– Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence
BNF	– Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
DdB	– Dieci di Balìa
Leg. e com.	– Legazioni e commissarie
OdP	– Otto di Pratica

Giuliano Soderini to the Dieci di Libertà e di Pace

Florence, AS, OdP, Resp., f. 50, fols 138 (Amiens, 4 August 1527), 140 (Amiens, 11 August 1527), 143r (Amiens, 18 August 1527, deciphered fol. 146r), 148 (Amiens, 28 August 1527, deciphered fol. 149r), 152r (Amiens, 28 August 1527), 157r (Amiens, 31 August 1527), 169 (Compiègne, 9 September 1527), 173v (Compiègne, 11 September 1527), 175–76r (Compiègne, 30 September 1527), 184–85 (Senlis, 9 October 1527), 187–88 (Senlis, 10 October 1527), 191–92 (Senlis, 18 October 1527), 179 (Paris, 23 October 1527), 184 (Paris, 2 November 1527), 196–97r (Paris, 7 November 1527), 200–01r (Paris, 12 November 1527), 207–08r (Paris, 24 November 1527), 212–13r (Paris, 6 November 1527), 214–16r (Paris, 25 December 1527), 233–34 (Paris, 25 March 1528), 235–36 (Poissy, 2 April 1528, deciphered fol. 237), 240–41r (Paris, 10 April 1528), 242r (Paris, 17 April 1528), 246–47 (Paris, 22 April 1528), 244–45r (Paris, 25 April 1528), 248–49 (Paris, 27 April 1528), 252–54r (Poissy, 4 May 1528, deciphered fols 256–258r), 262–63r (Poissy, 11 May 1528), 268 (Poissy, 15 May 1528), 270–71 (Poissy, 19 May 1528), 274 (Poissy, 20 May 1528), 276 (Poissy, 22 May 1528), 278–79r (Poissy, 27 May 1528), 281 (Poissy, 30 May 1528), 284–85 (Poissy, 9 June 1528), 288–89r (Paris, 11 June 1528), 290 (Paris, 16 June 1528), 292–93 (Paris, 19 June 1528), 294–96r (Paris, 27 June 1528, deciphered fol. 298), 300–01r (Paris, 30 June 1528, deciphered fol. 302), 304–05r (Paris, 30 June 1528), 301 (Paris, 1 July 1528, deciphered fol. 302), 306–07 (Paris, 2 July 1528¹²⁰), 308–09r (Paris, 13 July 1528), 318r (Paris, 24 July 1528), 310–12r (Poissy, 28 July 1528), 319–20 (Paris, 13 August 1528), 321–22 (Paris, 13 August 1528), 323r (Paris, 21 August 1528), 328r (Paris, 21 August 1528), 325 (Paris, 24 August 1528), 330–31r (Poissy, 28 August 1528), 332 (Paris, 30 August 1528), 334–35r (Paris, 31 August 1528), 340 (Paris, 4 September 1528), 342–43 (Paris, 5 September 1528, deciphered fols 344–46r), 350–51 (Paris, 12 September 1528, deciphered fols 352–55r), 362–63 (Melun, 23 September 1528, deciphered fol. 360),

¹²⁰ At the end of this letter, the secretary made a mistake and wrote ‘2 June’. Considering the text of the letter and its position in the *filza*, this letter was written on 2 July and not on 2 June.

366 (Paris, 5 October 1528), 370–71r (Melun, 17 October 1528), 372 (Paris, 19 October 1528), 374–75r (Paris, 24 October 1528, deciphered fol. 376), 386 (Paris, 29 October 1528), 396–97 (Poissy, 8 November 1528), 400–01 (Poissy, 9 November 1528), 392–93 (Poissy, 22 November 1528), 394 (Paris, 29 November 1528), 404–05 (Poissy, 9 November 1528), 410–11 (Poissy, 11 December 1528), 417–18r (Poissy, 1 January 1529), 419–21 (Paris, 19 January 1528), 414 (Paris, 24 January 1529), 422–25r (with Carducci, Paris, 1 February 1529).

Florence, AS, DdB, Resp., f. 127, fols 288 (with Carducci, Paris, 1 February 1529), 300–05 (with Carducci, Paris, 1 February 1529).

Sanudo, Marino, *Diarii*, v. XLVI, p. 604 (Paris, 7 February 1529).

The Dieci di Libertà e di Pace to Giuliano Soderini¹²¹

Florence, AS, DdB, Leg. e com., f. 42, fols 25v–26v (to Acciaiuoli, 11 July 1527), 27r–28v (11 July 1527), 57v–58v (15 August 1527), 62v–63v (19 August 1527), 77v–80r (30 August 1527), 94r–95r (10 September 1527), 97v–99r (13 September 1527), 105v–08r (22 September 1527), 122v–23r (12 October 1527), 130v (18 October 1527), 135 (23 October 1527), 135v–36v (25 October 1527), 165r–68v (10 November 1527), 174r (11 November 1527), 184v–85r (15 November 1527), 192r–94r (23 November 1527).

Florence, AS, DdB, Leg. e com., f. 43, fols 7r–10r (12 December 1527), 13 (16 December 1527), 25v–26r (21 December 1527), 52r–55r (2 January 1528), 61r–62r (3 January 1528), 63v–65v (4 January 1528), 92v–98r (19 January 1528), 123r–26r (30 January 1528), 127v (2 February 1528), 147v–50r (8 February 1528), 158r–60v (12 February 1528), 165r (13 February 1528), 177v–78v (19 February 1528), 180r–81r (19 February 1528), 183v–84r (20 February 1528), 203–05r (1 March 1528), 206r–07v (2 March 1528), 213v–14v (6 March 1528), 215v–16v (6 March 1528).

Florence, AS, DdB, Leg. e com., f. 44, fols 9v–11r (13 March 1528), 22r–23r (24 March 1528), 30v–31v (1 April 1528), 35v (2 April 1528), 45v–47v (11 April 1528), 52v–55v (16 April 1528), 65v–66v (23 April 1528), 73r–74v (27 April 1528), 77r–79r (1 May 1528), 79v (2 May 1528), 83v–84r (5 May 1528), 86 (8 May 1528), 86v–88r (9 May 1528), 90 (12 May 1528), 110v–14r (17 May 1528), 120r–22v (22 May 1528), 136r–38r (26 May 1528), 117r–19r (29 May 1528), 142–43 (30 May 1528), 155v–56r (6 June 1528), 158v–61r (7 June 1528), 164v–65v (10 June 1528), 172r–73v (16 June 1528), 176v–78r (18 June 1528),

¹²¹ All those letters were written from Florence.

184v–86r (21 June 1528), 186v (22 June 1528), 187v (22 June 1528), 196v–201v (26 June 1528), 210–212r (1 July 1528), 212v (2 July 1528), 223–227r (11 July 1528), 184r–86v (to G. Soderini and B. Carducci, 17 January 1529).

Florence, AS, DdB, Leg. e com., f. 45, fols 62–63 (3 June 1528), 5v–7v (19 July 1528), 16r–18r (25 July 1528), 25–26r (29 July 1528), 32–34 (5 August 1528), 39v–41r (12 August 1528), 50–52r (23 August 1528), 52v (24 August 1528, post-scriptum of the precedent), 56r (28 August 1528), 61r (1 September 1528), 63v (3 September 1528), 64–65r (3 September 1528), 66r (6 September 1528), 66v (7 September 1528), 67v–69v (8 September 1528), 71v–73 (12 September 1528), 76v–78 (18 September 1528), 79–80r (18 September 1528), 82v (20 September 1528), 83–86r (21 September 1528), 86v–87r (21 September 1528), 88 (21 September 1528), 88v–90r (24 September 1528), 91v–93 (26 September 1528), 95–96 (28 September 1528), 97v–98r (29 September 1528), 102–07r (6 October 1528), 108 (9 October 1528), 110r (10 October 1528), 111–13r (17 October 1528), 113r (to L. Gherardi, 17 October 1528), 116v–17 (23 October 1528), 119v–20 (27 October 1528), 122v–23 (4 November 1528), 124v–25r (7 November 1528), 130–34r (18 November 1528), 134v–35r (20 November 1528), 137–40 (to B. Carducci, 2 December 1528), 149v–54 (12 December 1528), 160–64r (27 December 1528), 171v–73r (6 January 1529), 176v–77 (9 January 1529), 178–80 (to G. Soderini and B. Carducci, 13 January 1529).

Florence, BNC, Gino Capponi, 321, fol. 39v–42r (28 December 1528), 42v–43v (6 January 1529).

The Dieci di Pace e di Libertà to G. Soderini and B. Carducci

Florence, AS, DdB, Leg. e com., f. 46, fols 2–4r (26 January 1529), 6v–8 (2 February 1529), 9v–11 (11 February 1529), 16 (15 February 1529).

Florence, BNC, Gino Capponi, 321, fol. 43v–46 (19 January 1529), 46r–48r (26 January 1529), 48 (1 February 1529), 48v–50 (4 February 1529), 50v–52 (11 February 1529), 54–56 (21 February 1529).

Niccolò Capponi to Giuliano Soderini

Paris, BNF, MS fr 3021, fol. 68r (Florence, 24 August 1528, digitalized and available online, URL: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90600303/f117.image>).

Florence, BNC, Gino Capponi 321, fols 36–39v (Florence, 18 November 1528) (already published in *Négociations...*, II, pp. 1003–1010; Eugenio Alberi, *L'assedio di Firenze illustrato con inediti documenti* (Firenze: Clio, 1840), pp. 227–235), 53–54r (20 February 1529).

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Pierre Nevejans – PhD student in Early Modern History, École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, Laboratoire TRIANGLE, UMR 5206; e-mail: pierre.nevejans@outlook.com