A STUDY OF THE LETTERS OF
ALESSANDRA STROZZI

ILUSTRATING THE SIGNIFICANT ROLE WHICH COULD BE PLAYED BY WOMEN IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

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This thesis is submitted in two parts. The first part consists of an analysis of the letters of Alessandra Strozzi to discover something of her family relationships and the education she received. Her understanding of politics and litigation during a period of turmoil is discussed, as well as her astute management of the family estate. These chapters are followed by a discussion of her personal life and the deprivation of close affective bonds. Finally it has been thought worthwhile to analyse the information on health in the letters to understand something of the life cycle of women and the health of the general community.

The second part of the thesis consists in the translation of sixteen of the most important letters in the collection.

PART ONE: Alessandra Strozzi and her Letters

The wonderfully rich public record of the Florentine Republic was created and maintained by men. Contemporary chroniclers ignored the role of women and women were also virtually excluded from the many personal and private records in Florentine diaries and libri segreti. Sixteenth century Florentine historians were men and throughout the succeeding centuries, the historians who recorded the deeds of men have been male and they continued to concentrate on the activities of males.

It is only since the development of interest in women's history in the late 1960s that the focus of
the history of Florence has been extended to include the lives of women and this interest has seen a significant increase in the body of material on the subject.¹

A major problem in pursuing studies into the roles and lives of women has been the paucity of material created by women themselves. However, many letters written by women have survived. These include a small collection of letters written by Dora del Bene to her husband and to her son between 1380 and 1396.² Five letters written by Isabella Guicciardini to her husband Luigi in Arezzo in the mid-sixteenth century were published in 1883, and there is also an unpublished letter from Isabella to Giovanni delle Bande Nere which is undated.³ Almost two hundred and fifty letters written in Prato by Margherita Datini to her husband Francesco in Florence at the end of the fourteenth century, have also been published.⁴ Many individual letters written by women are also to be found in the State Archives of Florence, many written to members of the Medici family to offer thanks for assistance already given, or appealing for help with financial

¹Patricia Simons, Gender and Sexuality in Renaissance and Baroque Italy: A working Bibliography, Power Institute of Fine Arts, The University of Sydney, 1988.

²Archivio di Stato, Carte del Bene, Filza 49, carte 131, c186, c253, c272, c273, and c341.

³I Guicciardini, 'Una Madrefamiglia di Cinquecento', La donna fiorentina, (Ed) I del Lungo, Firenze, 1883.

problems.5

The richest collection is provided by the letters of Alessandra Strozzi, daughter of Filippo di Niccolò Macinghi and widow of Matteo di Simone Strozzi. Seventy-two surviving letters, which were edited and published in 1877, were written between 1447 and 1470 to her sons in exile.6 These letters have been employed in studies of the Strozzi family and of the lives of Florentine women, in addition to their use by Nicolai Rubinstein for their political content in his study of Florentine government under the Medici.7

Heather Gregory used the letters in her study on the crisis in the extended Strozzi family caused

5Ministero dell' Interno, Archivio Mediceo avanti il Principato, Pubblicazioni degli Archivio di Stato, Firenze; Filza V, numero 918, Costanza Bentivoglio (undated); Filza VI, numero 122, Agata Agliata, Badessa dell Monastero di San Matteo (undated); Filza VI, numero 190, Chaterina dona di Mano Donati, 1454; Filza VII, numero 297, donna fu di Manno Donati (undated); Filza VII, numero 299, Ghostina de' Bardi (undated); Filza XVI, numero 32, Lucretia ?, 1446; Filza XVII, numero 279, Magdalena Bentivogli, 1468.

6A M Strozzi, Lettere di una Gentildonna fiorentina ai Figliuoli esuli. Alessandra Strozzi's letters were first published by Sansoni in Florence, in 1877, edited by Cesare Guasti. The edition used in this study was reprinted in 1972 by Sansoni's Licosa Reprints, Firenze, 1972. They were also published in 1914, using Guasti's text without notation, with an Introduction by G Papini. They were published again by Garzanti in 1987 with Introduction by Angela Bianchini. This edition again used Guasti's text, with the additional letter published by Isidoro del Lungo in 1890 in its chronological position as Lettera Seconda Aggiunta.

by the political exile of messer Palla di Nofri Strozzi and other members of the Strozzi. 

Ann Crabb made use of the Strozzi letters in her dissertation on the patrilineal relationships of Alessandra Strozzi and her sons with the extended Strozzi family. 

Crabb’s work explores the evident truth that the Strozzi lineage was the greatest family in Florence. Her dissertation has some focus on Alessandra herself as the ideal Florentine woman whose influence on her sons was directed at teaching them to conform to Florentine family values. Crabb explores the role of women in a patrilineal society and concludes that Alessandra Strozzi’s unusually strong position was due to the dependence of her sons on her management of the family estates in the absence of immediate male relatives.

In her recent monograph on the role of women in public life, Natalie Tomas argues that Alessandra’s network was largely female and that her information came from women relatives and friends when she reported on political activities in which she could not participate equally with men. 

Tomas sees Alessandra’s role as less significant than that of Marco Parenti and her male advisers, and proposes the theory that Florence consisted of a hierarchical

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structure of networks of influence, with powerful men at the top, women who were substituting for absent male relatives occupying the second rung of such a ladder with men, and the third layer consisting almost entirely of women.

Lauro Martines broke new ground with his 1974 study on non-domestic duties carried out by three Renaissance women, Isabella Guicciardini, Margherita Datini and Alessandra Strozzi, during the absence of their husbands from home.\textsuperscript{11} Martines referred to the 'jobs' performed by these women, although Alessandra Strozzi actually spent thirty years as head of her household and in control of her family estate. Another study based on the letters of the three women, Margherita Datini, Alessandra Strozzi and Isabella Guicciardini has shown in considerably more detail, that these three women all carried out the duties of managing family affairs and estates, and were probably representative of many women of the Renaissance period in making a substantial contribution to the community of Florence.\textsuperscript{12}

This present study uses Alessandra Strozzi's letters as the primary source for the investigation of the persona of Alessandra herself and her ambition to have her sons restored to their rightful place as scions of one of the oldest and most distinguished patrician families. It is intended to show that Alessandra Strozzi effectively managed her family affairs, despite the disadvantage of her gender and the political disgrace of the family, the difficult political situation, litigation, and the


heavy burden of taxation she faced. In her role as the effective head of her household, she managed her own financial affairs from the time of her return to Florence when she had very little in the way of assets, yet she quickly demonstrated her essential understanding of the complex taxation system of the Commune. The study explores Alessandra’s understanding and knowledge of the political ramifications of the government of Florence to expedite the return of her sons. Her ambition to see the restoration to wealth and position for her sons demanded that she should comprehend the methods of government and those in power, and the ramifications of the Medicean factional government and its intrigues were by no means beyond her comprehension.

It is not intended to pursue the effect of Alessandra’s contribution beyond the return of her sons to their native city and the study ends with the correspondence of 1466 when her goal was in sight. The result is well recorded in the later history of Florence, and in Filippo Strozzi’s patronage and the building of his superb Palazzo.\textsuperscript{13}

Alessandra Strozzi was the daughter of Filippo di Niccolò Macinghi, whose family was by no means a major family in early fifteenth century Florence, nor in the preceding century. The Macinghi is said to have been 'a prosperous but "new" family' which remained on the fringe of patrician society and regularly married into well known families.\textsuperscript{14} Filippo Macinghi himself married into two ancient

\textsuperscript{13} F W Kent "Più superba de quella de Lorenzo": Courtly and Family Interest in the Building of Filippo’s Strozzi’s Palace', Renaissance Quarterly, No. XXX, 1977, pp311-323.

\textsuperscript{14} M Phillips, The Memoir of Marco Parenti, Princeton, 1987, p76.
lineages. His first wife, Alessandra’s mother, was Caterina di Alberto Alberti and the daughter’s indomitable character may have stemmed in part from her Alberti family background.\textsuperscript{15} The Alberti, as a leading family, had suffered political ignominy at the hands of the powerful Albizzi faction at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth century. Despite the accompanying social handicap, the Alberti lineage remained prominent and marriage to a member of the disgraced family proved no hindrance to Filippo’s second marriage into the even more ancient and honourable Ricasoli family.

Alessandra was married to Matteo di Simone Strozzi with a large dowry, and this marriage placed Alessandra in a significant position in relation to the Macinghi ambition to consolidate their position in the patriciate. By 1434, she had borne Matteo nine children at regular intervals during fourteen years of marriage, seven of whom survived when Florentine politics intervened in Alessandra’s life. Matteo was exiled by the Medici government on their return to power in 1434, and he and Alessandra lived in Pesaro until Matteo’s death with three of the children, within two years after leaving Florence. Alessandra gave birth to her last child, Matteo di Matteo after Matteo’s death in Pesaro.

She then returned to Florence with the five surviving children, where she confronted the task of rehabilitating her family with great courage, despite her seriously disadvantaged position as a woman, the widow of a political exile and later, as

the mother of exiles.

Throughout the long period of her sons' absence she sustained their morale with her affectionate and often humorous letters. Although there was minimal personal contact between them, her sons continued to have strong filial feelings for their mother, and she ensured the continuation of their allegiance to the Strozzi lineage and to Florence.

The first chapter of this study considers the letters and the education which enabled Alessandra to write them. The following chapters deal with her political observations and activity, and her management of her sons' patrimony and the family financial matters, as the head of the household. Finally her personality and her affective bonds with her family is examined and her life as a woman in the Quattrocento.

PART II: Translation of Selected Letters

The second part of the thesis consists in the translation of sixteen of the most important letters in the collection. Six of the letters are of the period immediately after the death of Cosimo de' Medici in August 1464 and ten were written during the period of intense lobbying for the rescission of the ban on Filippo and Lorenzo Strozzi in 1465.

The letters were chosen from the correspondence between August 1464 and January 1466, the last two years, to show just how complex was the political crisis which followed Cosimo's death and Alessandra's understanding of the manifestations of this unsettled period of Florentine history. The translations also relate just how involved were the negotiations and the pitfalls in the making of a marriage contract and just how lengthy this process could be, and the significance of such alliances.
CHAPTER ONE

EDUCATION AND LETTERS

Alessandra Strozzi's letters provide a rare insight into the lives of Florentine citizens in the mid-Quattrocento in a wealth of detail, through the activities, thoughts and feelings of a woman. The uncertain exchange of letters formed Alessandra's slender line of communication with her expatriate sons, together with messages by word of mouth from relatives and friends. Seventy-three of the letters remain in the State Archives of Florence, in the Carte Strozziane, together with her workbooks and accounts. The letters cover a period of twenty three years from 1447 to 1470, and it is clear from the references to letters not included in this collection that there were many more letters written. These gaps seriously frustrate efforts to establish a complete picture of Alessandra's life in Florence.

The diaries and letters kept by men were carefully written for posterity and these often didactic documents were intended by the writers to present their own preferred perception of their

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\(^1\) A M Strozzi, *Lettere di una Gentildonna fiorentina*, C Guasti (ed.), Firenze, 1877. Of the letters in the collection, seventy one were collected and edited by Cesare Guasti and published in 1877, together with *Lettera Quinta* which had been edited by Isidoro del Lungo in 1874 and published for the Forteguerri-Guicciardini marriage in that year. An unnumbered letter, which fits chronologically between the second and third letters and written only four days after the second letter has been added to the original seventy two in this collection, and is separately paginated.
family and affairs. On the other hand, Alessandra Strozzi’s letters represent her personal views and she would not have expected that they would be read by anyone other than the intended recipients, her sons, who lived and worked away from Florence for over twenty years.

Filippo himself was almost certainly responsible for preserving Alessandra’s letters, as most of them are addressed to him and they were important personal papers. It is seems that many letters, to which there are later references, were not preserved, for Alessandra conscientiously recorded the date of her current letter and those immediately preceding it in this collection. Identification of the couriers was another means of checking the arrival of letters, and in the absence of any references to letters as missing, obviously most arrived safely thanks to careful choice of bearer. It is indeed more remarkable that so many of Alessandra’s letters survived five hundred years than that many have been lost.

The correspondence between Alessandra and her sons had begun before August 1447, as shown by a reference to Filippo’s letter of July 16 of that year, and also by Alessandra’s awareness of details of their lives. Filippo, Lorenzo and Matteo were still able to enter Florence freely at that time and letters were probably regarded as of less

significance for that reason although there were few occasions on which they did return.

The letters fall into two main groups, the first containing twenty-seven letters written between 1447 and 1463, with the second group comprising the forty-three written between the end of 1463 and the beginning of 1466. The final three letters were written after Filippo's return from exile. Five letters of the period from August 1447 to February 1450 and six to 1451 were written to Filippo, followed by one to Lorenzo in 1453. There is then an unexplained hiatus of five and a half years between the 1453 letter to Lorenzo and a 1458 letter to Matteo. Possibly letters of that five-year period were among the losses suffered in the severe earthquake that struck Naples in December 1456 which Filippo described vividly in a letter written in that month. He claimed that he had previously written, on November 28, and had received Alessandra's of November 13. This shows that, despite missing letters, the correspondence was maintained on a reasonably regular basis, although there are no surviving letters of the following two years.

As Alessandra gave no reason for not having written despite recording the receipt of letters, it is likely that she was continuing to write, although she once said that she had not written for several months because she had been ill. There are nine letters of the period December 1459, then a break of fourteen months

3 Strozzi, Lettere, L12, 135. 'I'ho ricevuto più tue, ed è parecchi mesi non ho scritto nè a te nè a Filippo.'

4 Ibid., L10, p115. 'L'utima ti scrissi fu a di 11 di dicembre, e non t'ho iscritto poi, che ho 'vuto male di stomaco, e non ho potuto istar chinata a scrivere.'
before the commencement of the increasingly prolific correspondence of the 1460s which continued to February 1466.\textsuperscript{5} The incomplete collection renders it impossible to establish any overall pattern or routine in Alessandra’s letter writing until the final two years.

Two significant factors for Alessandra were the cost of having letters conveyed to distant cities and the even greater worry of mail falling into the wrong hands. The factual contents do not always seem to warrant such fear, many of the early letters referring only to personal and family matters. The choice of carrier was based on these two important considerations, and the problem was resolved by the resourceful Alessandra, who resorted to Strozzi family members to ensure that continuous contact with her sons should be maintained. She always displayed a strong preference for having relatives carry her letters, although close friends and trusted servants of long-standing travelling to Naples carrying goods for her were also pressed into service. Soldo di Bernardo degli Strozzi, a family member, was a letter-bearer who, had he not become ill, would also have been entrusted with the sensitive task of escorting Matteo to Naples.\textsuperscript{6} Tommaso Ginori, named eleven times, was the most frequent letter-bearer and was entrusted with the important private matters which could only be

\textsuperscript{5}Naples was the destination of the fourteen letters written in 1464 and twenty six letters written in 1465, by which time Lorenzo had joined Filippo in Naples.

\textsuperscript{6}Strozzi, Lettere, L3, p45, ‘Avvisoti come Soldo giunse qui a’di 15 del passato, ed era di malavoglia.’
delivered verbally. Alessandra occasionally employed her sharefarmers, such as Agnolo di Papi from her farm at Quaracchi, who had a pecuniary interest in the safe delivery of goods and an unquestioned loyalty to his employer. There are several references to Favilla the carrier and the continuous exchange of farm produce and goods between Naples and Florence necessitated the use of such carriers, and on one occasion he undertook to carry goods for Alessandra without cost.

The 250km journey from Florence to Rome probably took at least eight days in the fifteenth century, with a further five or six days for the next 200km to Naples. Horses could not travel thirty kilometres in a day over the rough ground and mules considerably fewer. Carts and carriages were rarely used before the sixteenth century owing to poorly maintained roads which were little more than tracks, so couriers generally used mules, carrying goods in saddle bags. The fastest delivery was little more than fourteen days although if the courier was on foot, delivery might require twenty


8Ibid, L3, p48. See also Note B, p50.

9Ibid, L2, p36. 'che un mese fa mi promisse il Favilla vetturale recarme in dono:' In a footnote, the Editor, C Guasti, writes that 'in dono' means 'senza spesa'. Later, this same Favilla had to beg to be paid his dues, L10, p117, and for this see chapter on Finances.

10These times are assessed on elapsed times from date of writing to the date of receipt, both recorded on most of the letters.

to thirty days. The weather must have played an important part although severe winters do not seem to have been responsible for many delays. However, in the winter of 1450, one letter took forty-four days to reach Naples from Florence. As an alternative to the long road journey from Florence to Naples via Rome, goods could be sent overland from Florence or carried down the river Arno to Pisa and thence by sea to Naples. Alternatively, travellers could make their way overland to Rome and then take a ferry down the river Tiber, thence across the bay to Naples. As early as 1448 Matteo wrote to Filippo that they preferred to send goods overland to Rome and onward by ferry as it took only one and a half days down the river from Rome to Naples, a saving in time and money.\(^{12}\) Galleys plying between Naples and Pisa carried goods although letters were more likely to be carried overland.\(^{13}\) Sea voyages, although regularly undertaken, were very hazardous and Giovanni Bonsi was said to have anxiously awaited the arrival of a galley at Livorno with a load of cloth.\(^{14}\) Passengers also travelled by galley and Alessandra wrote of anticipating the imminent arrival from Barcelona by Giovenco della Stufa’s galley, of the young girl, Isabella di Iacopo.\(^{15}\) It was learned with dismay in Florence of the loss of a galley off

\(^{12}\) Strozzi, Lettere, L9, Note A, p114, ‘perché da Roma a Napoli preferivano di portare le mercanzie per acqua, essendovi risparmio di spesa e di tempo; ché in un giorno e mezzo si faceva quel tragitto.’

\(^{13}\) Ibid., L19, p206. ‘e per questa galea d’ora die’ a Batista...’

\(^{14}\) Ibid., L20, p221, ‘Giovanni Bonsi aspetta per le galee el panno, e a chi l’abbia a chiedere quando giugneranno a Livorno.’

\(^{15}\) Ibid., L9, p111. This girl lived with Alessandra until her marriage.
the coast of Flanders with many people aboard.\textsuperscript{16}

The arrival date of fifty four (54) letters in Naples is documented, permitting accurate assessment of elapsed time for delivery.\textsuperscript{17} Roads had improved markedly by the 1460s and more accommodation was available for travellers and letters seldom took more than two weeks. By July 1465 the commercial mail service seems to have been used with Alessandra waiting for the boy with letters on Mondays or Tuesdays. The last letter in the collection in 1470 was delivered in only six days from Florence to Naples!

Fifty-three (53) of the letters were written to Filippo in Naples, to which he responded relatively promptly - as acknowledged by his mother - although few of these replies survive. Of the remainder, eleven (11) were written to Lorenzo in Bruges, a major trading city on the route between East and West for the valuable silk and spice trade so mails were comparatively swift despite the greater distance from Florence.\textsuperscript{18} Seven (7) were addressed to Filippo and Lorenzo jointly when they were together latterly in Naples. A single letter to Matteo, her youngest son, dated just a year before his death in Naples at the age of twenty-four and

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., L29, p282, "Ara'sentito della galea perduta en Fiandra, che è stato grande scurita: perduto tante persone e la roba."

\textsuperscript{17}Any statistical analysis is frustrated by the random nature of the letters of the earlier years, compared with the relatively regular correspondence of the final two years of exile. However, delivery time to Naples averaged fifteen days for the fifty-four letters, thirty-two taking fewer than fourteen days and a further twelve between fourteen and twenty-one days. Only five required more than twenty-one days.

\textsuperscript{18}The fastest delivery to Bruges across the Alps was twenty-three days with sixty days the longest, an average time of thirty-six days.
one to Iacopo di Lionardo in Bruges, Lorenzo’s mentor, complete the collection. Many letters obviously did not survive, leaving gaps for which no explanation can be deduced. Nowhere is there a suggestion that any letters were not received and while loss in transit was possible, it is more likely that they were lost or destroyed after receipt, accidentally or even deliberately. The possibility of physical damage by poor storage facilities or the elements is shown with the inclusion of the damaged letter. Alessandra’s complaints of being unable to write during periods of ill-health also account for some gaps.

Alessandra’s letters were written by an articulate and eloquent woman, written ‘without affectation and without useless ornamentation’, giving a better idea of the Florentine idiom in the city’s most glorious century and a true picture of private life in Florence. Whatever schooling she received in reading, writing and l’abbaco, she applied all three to good effect in writing her letters and in her daily business life. Lack of documentation on Alessandra’s education only allows analysis of her letters to establish the level of her erudition. To learn something of the education she may have received it is necessary to examine the education of female children in Florence in the Quattrocento. This shows that standards varied according to the social position, wealth and education of fathers. Classical learning for women was rarely seen in Florence before the mid-Quattrocento. Guarino da Verona, who taught female students in his classes in Verona, taught in

19A M Strozzi, Lettere ai Figlioli, R Carabba (ed), 1914, p7, from the introduction by Giovanni Papini, ‘un quadro completo e fedele di quel che fosse la vita privata in Firenze...sono scritte senza affettazione, senza ornamenti inutili...’
Florence from 1410 to 1414. His presence may have had an advantageous influence on the education of females in that city.\textsuperscript{20}

Although Alessandra may have shared the classroom of her younger brother Zanobi, her only uterine sibling, this cannot be confirmed.\textsuperscript{21} Alessandra was an intelligent sixteen-year-old wife, and she could have learned rapidly from her husband, the respected humanist scholar Matteo di Simone Strozzi, who had studied under well-known teachers. Later, when Matteo was exiled to Pesaro, Alessandra may have met Baptista di Montefeltro, the wife of Pesaro’s leader, Galeazzo Malatesta.\textsuperscript{22}

Two patrician Florentine women, a little younger than Alessandra Strozzi, were regarded as literate in the classical sense. Lucretia Tornabuoni (born in 1425), wife of Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici and mother of Lorenzo, wrote hymns and poetry. The other was Alessandra de’ Bardi, wife of Lorenzo di messer Palla Strozzi, and more nearly Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi’s contemporary. Vespasiano da Bisticci wrote that it was Alessandra de’ Bardi’s

\textsuperscript{20}Vespasiano da Bisticci, \textit{Le Vite}, 2 Vols, Firenze, 1970 and 1976, in ‘Vita di Matheo di Simone degli Istrozi’ p221. The teaching of Guarino may have had an influence on Matteo di Simone Strozzi, Alessandra’s future husband, who was a member of a coterie of intellectual men who also studied Aristotelian ethics under messer Giannozzo Manetti.

\textsuperscript{21}Strozzi, \textit{Lettere}, L4, Note A, p62. Alessandra and Zanobi also had one half-brother, Antonio and two half-sisters, Caterina and Ginevra. Nothing is known of the education of their father, Filippo di Niccolò Macinghi.

\textsuperscript{22}M L King, ‘Book-lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the early Italian Renaissance’, in P H Labalme (Ed) \textit{Beyond their Sex}, pp119-133. Baptista may have been possibly the first woman to receive a humanist education, although her teacher has not been identified.
mother who 'diligently attended to her education'. The little documentation on education offered to women in Florence suggests that a very few Florentine patricians received a classical education, unlike the many well-educated patrician women from northern Italy. Alessandra’s letters reveal no familiarity with literature, nor do they contain any recognised classical allusions, despite her husband’s renowned collection of scholarly manuscripts.

Alessandra’s own views on education are virtually unknown although early education in behaviour and religion was undoubtedly regarded as part of the duties of the mother. It is not known whether her daughters were able to read and write, but it is likely that they could do so, as most women of the patrician class in Florence were expected to read and write and to be able to keep accurate account books. Alessandra obviously

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24 ML King, ‘Book-lined Cells: Women and Humanism in the early Italian Renaissance’, in Labalme (ed) Beyond their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past, p67. Among the few Florentine women possibly identifiable as having a classical education was Alessandra Scala, daughter of Bartolommeo Scala, Chancellor of Florence.


regarded favourably the ability to read of a potential wife for her son, although it may not yet have been a universal attribute. Filippo's wife, Fiammetta, was certainly literate.

Letter writing by women was certainly quite prolific during the period of Alessandra Strozzi's lifetime and Florentine women from all walks of life wrote letters to prominent citizens for many different reasons. These letters often appealed for help with financial matters and there are many such letters extant. It is not always possible to be certain of the identity of the actual writer of these letters, as scribes were in common use. A small collection of letters written between 1381 and 1396 by Dora del Bene to her husband and son show that in the previous century there were also women who were literate, if without the benefit of a classical education. The Trecento letters of Margherita Datini, from the Archivio Storico Pratese, have also been published. Margherita

27 Strozzi, Lettere, Letter 52, p464, 'e ch'ella legge così bene.'

28 Ibid., L72, Note C, pp598-9. A letter written by Fiammetta to her husband, Filippo in July 1469.

29 From the collection, Archivio Mediceo avanti il Principato, in the Archivio di Stato, Firenze; three examples of the letters of women follow here: Filza VI, numero 190, Chaterina dona di mano donati, regarding the payment of 300 florins, x ott., 1454. Filza VI, numero 482, Badessa e suore, monastero della Beata Cristiane, 1 ott. 1460. Filza XIV, numero 479, Badessa di Santa Felicita, Firenze, a Piero di Cosimo.

30 Carte del Bene, Filze 49, Archivio di Stato, Firenze.

31 Le Lettere di Margherita Datini a Francesco di Marco: 1384-1410, a cura di Valeria Rosati, Cassa di Risparmi e Depositi, 1977, from the Archivio Storico Pratese. The youngest child of a Florentine patrician family in political exile in Avignon, it is possible that she learned to read a little with
learned to read and write as an adult to enable her to communicate with her husband personally rather than through the offices of a scribe.32

Handwriting style also helped to identify the education of the writer and Alessandra’s style appears to have been based on that of Matteo.33 In the women’s letters available, the handwriting of religious women most nearly approximates the humanist script of Poggio. In contrast with Alessandra’s neat writing and that of the religious women,34 a letter written by Lucretia Tornabuoni to her husband, Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici, is written in an exceedingly untidy and ill-formed hand, despite Lucretia’s reputation as a highly literate her siblings but did not then learn to write.


33Strozzi, Lettere, Proemio, (ed) Guasti, pxvii, ‘Anche nello scrivere aveva Matteo una mano da uomo letterato, non da mercante: i paleografico sanno come i due caratteri differiscano, e i mercantili siano di lettera aspra.’ B L Ullman, The Origin and Development of Humanistic Script, Roma, 1960, p77. See endnote to this chapter for facsimile of Poggio’s handwriting which shows the precise handwriting of learned men. Denys Hay, The Italian Renaissance in its Historical Background, Cambridge University Press, 1981, p82 for Petrarch’s contribution to handwriting styles. Matteo di Simone, as a recognized humanist intellectual had the neat, small and rounded handwriting of a learned man. Using the script invented by Poggio and not the strictly Roman or Italic style as developed by Petrarch.

34Medicei avanti il principato (MAP), Filza xxix, numero 47. Letter in Archivio di Stato, Florence (ASF), from Abbess of San Martino Convent to Lorenzo de’ Medici, February 6, 1472(s.f). See endnote to this chapter for facsimile of the handwriting of the Abbess Lisabetta of San Martino Convent. An example of Alessandra’s writing of 1448 is also included in the endnotes to this chapter.
Alessandra wrote in what was essentially a spoken language with as yet unwritten rules of grammar although the evolution to modern Tuscan Italian was almost complete, as her letters demonstrate. The content of the letters was relatively consistent grammatically and she used verb tenses in a recognisable manner, the subjunctive mood to express doubt in much the same way as it is used in modern Italian and the number and gender of articles, pronouns and adjectives usually agree with the nouns. The vernacular language of Florence had been used by Trecento writers which had helped to popularise this language with learned men before the promotion of classical Latin studies by the humanist movement. Scholars of the Quattrocento who used Latin, also wrote frequently in the vernacular, thus contributing beneficially to the Tuscan language.

MAP, Filza xvi, numero 32. Letter from Lucretia de' Medici to her husband Piero de' Medici, May 17, 1446. It is inconceivable that any scribe employed in the household of Piero de' Medici would have written in such uncouth script. See Endnote for facsimile of Lucretia de' Medici's handwriting.

The education of the men of patrician and many mercantile families included the study of Latin. It can be concluded that in these homes, a relatively standardised and grammatical form of the vernacular, based on Latin, was spoken. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to assume that the females in an educated family would have followed suit.


D Hay, *The Italian Renaissance in its Historical Background*, Cambridge, 1981, p134. Alberti was one of the advocates of the use of the vernacular although it was to be more than a hundred years after his death and that of Alessandra Strozzi before the *Accademia della Crusca* was formed in 1583.
When Alessandra's letters were first published in the late nineteenth century, corrections were made to her Tuscan Italian at the time of publication. Many of the fifteenth century usages such as 'h' following 'c' in the words *chome* and *chasa* were eliminated and her own corrected errors were also omitted. Alessandra's spelling remained relatively consistent throughout, with some reservations regarding the editing, which corrected 'errors' such as *ebi*, replacing it with the later *ebbi*. Acute accents, which she did not use, were added to such words as *e_piu* and *virtu*. Modern punctuation was substituted for the oblique '/' used by Alessandra and this has considerably reduced the smooth flow of her narrative. Her reasonably uniform sentence construction lends credibility to the belief that her education was of a good standard, if not based on a classical model. She used idiosyncratic line endings such as *se_mpre* and *siman_cherebbe*, which are not regular syllabic breaks and this suggests that she was possibly and produced the *Vocabolario della Crusca* in an attempt to unite the diverse aspects of the regional language developments.

Cesare Guasti who edited, transcribed and annotated Alessandra Strozzi's letters for publication, added explanatory footnotes.

*chome* = *come* (how, as, like) and *chasa* = *casa* (lineage, house, home).

It has been possible to ascertain these editing changes from the one letter in the collection in Alessandra's handwriting. This letter is dated November 8, 1448, and was published in 1890 with an introduction by Isidoro del Lungo and is chronologically the third letter of the collection. It is the only autograph letter to which I have access at present. It is separately paginated, 7-11.

*p_iu* = *più*, more, *virtu* = *virtù*, virtue, talent, and *e* = *è*, 3rd person singular of the present indicative of the verb *essere* = to be.
familiar with the writing of humanist scholars. 43

Alessandra’s style remained consistent throughout the period of twenty two years, confirming that she wrote her own letters. 44 Her vocabulary was certainly adequate for her needs and in two letters taken at random, fifteen years apart, each contained just over one thousand words. 45 Approximately one-third of these words are used only once which seems to encompass an adequate, if modest, vocabulary. While suggesting that we should not ‘seek a learned woman’, Cesare Guasti established with considerable difficulty one expression, ch’io ne sia consolata, which he chose to believe came from Dante, in direct contradiction of his own argument. 46 The phrase in the Inferno was similar but the more likely explanation is that the phrase from Dante had entered the idiomatic language of Florence and was thus in common usage. It is difficult to believe that Alessandra directly quoted that writer in view of the total absence otherwise of literary references. The letter in which it occurred was, in fact, written to her

43 Ullman, Humanistic Script, p129, ‘justification’ of line endings as used by classical scholars has been discussed at some length by Ullman. Strozzi, Lettere, handwritten letter of November 8, 1448 – sempre and simancherebbe.

44 It is highly unlikely that Alessandra ever had recourse to a professional scribe, especially in view of the personal nature and sometimes political significance of her letters and her oft-repeated references to the need for secrecy.

45 Strozzi, Lettere, Letter 5, February 8, 1449 (s.f.) pp67-72, and Letter 49, July 26 1465, pp441–446.

46 Ibid., Proemio, (Guasti, Ed) pxi, ‘Non è dunque da cercare in queste Lettere la donna dotta.’ Ibid., L5, p72. Dante actually wrote in the Inferno, II, 67, from La Divina Commedia, ‘L’aiuta si, ch’i’ne sia consolata’.
twenty-year-old son who had been living in Naples for several years and whose education had been concentrated on mercantile rather than literary skills, and who was unlikely to have recognised or appreciated literary allusions.

Alessandra’s facility with words was well displayed in her use of metaphor and irony. She did not often allow bitterness to warp her outlook although her irony was bitter indeed when she gave her opinion of the doctors in Naples who had treated her son Matteo and the Florentine ambassador, Pandolfo Pandolfini, both of whom died, despite the 'clever' doctors. Alessandra had a sense of humour, and she clearly derived a great deal of amusement from her observations on the downfall of politicians, which she appears to have shared with her son Filippo. She referred to Niccolò Soderini, the Gonfalonier of Justice, her brother-in-law, as a 'bighead', and reported Soderini’s brother’s comment that he ‘came in like a lion, and left like a lamb’. Later, she described him and his Council as 'nine madmen' after a singularly ineffectual term in office. The esteemed Council of the Signoria was said to have ‘stood like donkeys in a hailstorm’, not knowing which way to turn. The Council was again the object of her scorn when it was unable to make a decision and she described it as ‘blowing like a leaf in the wind’. She again derived her own dry and ironic amusement in

47Ibid., L63, p535. ‘un gran cappellaccio’.
48Ibid., L65, p550. ‘Egli è entrato lione e uscira agnello’. This is derived from a biblical quotation.
49Ibid., L65, p548. ‘nove pazzi’.
50Ibid., L60, p520. ‘E stanno come asino a gragnola’.
51Ibid., L67, p568. ‘volgonsi come la foglia al vento’.
commenting on Luca Pitti, 'this great knight, with a swelled head.' In the last years of her sons' exile she described prominent figures on the political scene in scathing terms with no apparent fear of repercussions. Her references to Niccolo Soderini, an adversary over many years, clearly demonstrate her low opinion of him. Her own natural humour showed through when she wrote 'Don't look askance at my beautiful writing,' and on another occasion she told Filippo that he would read again and again the letter she had just written while wearing her spectacles, because it was so easy to understand. Of Lorenzo, when looking for a wife for him, she wrote that 'he tries so slowly'.

The letters are very articulate documents although some difficulty with the idiom can be experienced and the use of colloquial phrases has led to occasional misinterpretation by scholars who have studied them. Such misinterpretation has not necessarily been of great significance with many of the colloquialisms and aphorisms which she employed being still in use. Her letters contained a wide range of topics and she wrote in no very logical sequence and with frequent repetition. The very

52Ibid., L27, p267. 'questo magno cavaliere; ben gonfierà la vescica:'

53Niccolo Soderini was the husband of Alessandra’s half-sister, Ginevra. See chapter on Litigation for the successful legal challenge made on behalf of her Macinghi relatives to reclaim the estate of her father, Filippo di Niccolo.

54Strozzi, Lettere, L34, p309, 'Non guatare al mio bello scrivere:...'

55Ibid., L39, p347. 'Questa mia è scritta cogli occhiali: rileggete e rivolgete più d'una volta, tanto che la intendiate bene.'

56Ibid., L35, p313. 'Cercherassi così pianamente.'
absence of intellectual content helped to maintain in the correspondence the natural and personal atmosphere by which she sought to ensure that the young men should continue to feel that they were an integral part of her family. So she moved from one subject to another as she tried to remember everything she needed to tell them, castigating them for their misdoings with love and reminding them, always affectionately, of their duty to their mentors.57

The early correspondence covered many different topics including the marriages of her daughters and others, the dowries and parentado involved, the clothing for personal use and the visits of family and friends from outside the city. Illnesses and deaths of family members were recorded, also excursions to the farms in the country for the summer or to escape epidemics of 'plague' or back to the city for the same reason.

The first letter in this collection is a good example of the many topics covered in most of the letters. It is likely that this letter marked the turning point in her relationship with Filippo as in this letter she acknowledged his role as the eldest son and head of the family.58 It probably also contained the first reference to a serious financial transaction; in this case it was Caterina’s dowry, which would ensure that the letter would need to be retained for the family records. Certainly Alessandra recognized the importance of advising

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57Ibid., L1, p8. 'Fa’sopra tutto, figliuol mio, che tu ti porti bene en modo, che dove l’anno passato mi desti tanto dolore de’tua tristi modi, tu mi dia consolazione: e considera allo stato tuo, e quello che Niccolò ha fatto inverso di te, che se’ degno di baciare la terra dove e’ pone e piedi.’

58See chapter on Affective Bonds for Alessandra’s relationship with her sons.
Filippo of the complex arrangements for the payment of the dowry, Marco's background and parentado.\textsuperscript{59} In the same letter she described Caterina's lavish clothes and permitted herself a rare moment of pride in her daughter's beauty. This was quickly followed by her excuses for not allowing Matteo to leave home to go to Filippo in Naples and moved on to her continuing problems with her taxes; this led, in turn, to mention of the effect of the death of the Duke of Milan on taxes and government expenditure. Caterina asked for cosmetic soap and beauty treatments, adding that she had been too busy with Caterina's affairs to write. However Matteo would now be able to write for her, as he needed the practice. She described her unhappiness that Filippo had not paid her a visit when on a recent trip to Livorno. Next, she enjoined him to pay due respect to Niccolo Strozzi, his mentor, and to keep his hands to himself when acting as cashier, suggesting that Filippo may not have been absolutely honest with his employer's money or goods - which could account for references to the trouble he had caused Niccolo and his mother.

The early letters were essentially of commonplace and everyday domestic matters, such as the making and mending of shirts, handkerchiefs and towels and of delays in bleaching cloth owing to bad weather causing further delays in finishing garments.\textsuperscript{60} Instructions on the preservation of cheese were included for the young man and she asked Filippo's opinion of the flavour of the fennel from


\textsuperscript{60}Strozzi, \textit{Lettere}, L8, pp99-100 'Le camice tagliate e cucite a modo nostro, e cosi e fazzoletti e lo sciugatoio, come s'usa qua.'
Florence. The correspondence contained details of merchandise sent back and forth for sale including flax, cloth, almonds, capers, fennel and cheeses. The need to take insurance against the loss of unrecovered dowry in the Monte was a priority which arose in 1450.61 In succeeding years, property matters, inheritance and associated legal matters and business transactions appear to have had priority in many of the letters. There were several references to the legal action brought against her by her natal family, the Macinghi, to regain the estates of her father and her own brother, Zanobi Macinghi which had been left to her.62 Alessandra was always concerned about money and she had problems in paying taxes, excise duties and carriers were regularly mentioned. The details of the economies of a penurious widow with frequent references in the letters to the cost of goods and cartage show that Alessandra was always conscious of material values.63 She did not hesitate to complain about bitter plums which were not worth the excise

61J Kirshner and A Molho, 'The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Early Quattrocento Florence', Journal of Modern History, 50, September 1978, pp403-38. The 1425 legislation required that investment in the Monte be forfeit if the girl died before expiration of the term (p406) but amendment in 1433 permitted the return of the deposit if the girl died before marriage (p408). See also chapter on Finances for the insurance taken out on Caterina’s life when she was pregnant.

62Strozzi, Lettere., L20, p220, ‘Sentisti la morte d’Antonio Macigni, e come e figliuoli di Giovacchino e Carlo [di Niccolò Macinghi] si preparavano a volere questa redità d’Antonio per vigore del testamento di nostro padre, che lascio reda costoro, dopo la morte di Zanobi e Antonio, morendo senza reda.’ See also chapters on finances and litigation.

63Ibid., L9, p111, ‘che nulla costerà la vettura.’
she had been obliged to pay. As the wealth of her sons grew, later letters spoke of wine, spices and aromatics and smoked roe as well as fruits such as plums and oranges.

The imposition of a twenty-five year sentence of exile on her sons in December 1458 was a devastating blow, although it was almost certainly anticipated. Possibly as a result of a punitive censorship which required that all letters be shown to the Otto di Guardia, there are no letters of the period immediately following to document her feelings about the sentence, and she maintained a discreet silence on the subject thereafter. The censorship on letters was lifted a few weeks later, at the beginning of 1459. The exiles, who were initially not permitted within 100 miles of Florence, had this distance reduced to 50 miles within a few weeks. The 50-mile limit appeared to be still in place in May 1460 when Alessandra and Filippo met in San Quirico but it had been reduced when Lorenzo came to Florence in 1465. He was not permitted to enter the city, although he was able to

64 Ibid., L43, p380. 'Ebbi a questi dì un bariglione di susine, che mi costano tra vettura da Pisa a qui, e gabella, 30 soldi, che non gli vagliono.'

65 Ibid., L13, Note A, p150, in November 1459 Filippo asked Francesco degli Strozzi to clarify the position with regard to letters, and received this reply: 'Tu di’se da ogni uficio degli Otto s’ha 'vere licenza dello scrivere. Maisl, che s’ha avere licenza com’entra di nuovo l’uficio, imperò sempre fanno mettere bando non si possa scrivere a’confinati sanza licenza ec.' S F Baxendale, 'Exile in Practice', Renaissance Quarterly, Vol 44, 1991.

66 Ibid., L13, p143. 'Di poi hanno appressato e confìnì miglia 50, e abbiamo auto licenza di potere iscrivere sanza mostrare le lettere agli Otto, le vostre e le mie.'
approach the gates quite closely at that time.\textsuperscript{67}

Alessandra wrote her letters to maintain contact with her absent sons, although she always regarded the first-hand news that she received from relatives as more valuable than any letters. She repeated frequently her belief that it was best for important information to be passed on personally 'by mouth'.\textsuperscript{68} Although their correspondence was ostensibly free of censorship she began to use a number cipher to refer not only to political figures but also to members of the family.\textsuperscript{69} It was a relatively simple code and it would be surprising if contemporary readers had not been able to decipher it; the advantage would have been not so much in its contribution to secrecy as in giving the writer the opportunity to deny having written anything incriminating. In the uncertain times following Cosimo's death, in 1464, her preference for firsthand information became a matter of necessity.

The letters are occasionally quite intimate documents and in particular that written immediately after Matteo's death in exile is very poignant and personal, and devoted to family affairs.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{67}Ibid., L43, Note A, p381, 'Eccoun brano di lettera scrittda Lorenzo al fratello mentre strottava a Firenze, "a la porta a S. Piera a Gattolini". =A di 10 di febbraio. Iersera, per la grazia di Dio, giunsi qui a la porta...'

\textsuperscript{68}Ibid., L15, p160 'per sentire di te novelle di bocca'. See also L19, p203, 'che a bocca mi disse buone novelle di te,'

\textsuperscript{69}Ibid., L28, p275 and \textit{Ibid.}, L32, footnote on p300. Cesare Guasti was able to attribute many of the numbers but the letters in which the cipher was used remain obscure in parts.

\textsuperscript{70}Ibid., L17, p178, 'Per la qual cosa ho auto un'amaritudine grandissima dell'esser privata di tale figliuolo;' and in \textit{ibid.}, L18, p195, 'e benchè gran doglia fussi nel cuor mio a fare risposta a tal novella,'
face of this affliction her devotion to her surviving sons appeared to become even greater, if possible. Within a few weeks she was once more involved in the ever-present struggle to find the wherewithal to pay taxes. News of family health, death and marriages continued to loom large. The arrival and enthronement of the new Archbishop amidst much pomp was also considered of sufficient interest for her sons as the Strozzi had formerly played a traditional role in such events.

Soon after this Filippo travelled to San Quirico, probably with the intention of avoiding some of the problems of war in Naples. Apparently Alessandra travelled to San Quirico to meet him, as letters from Niccolò Ardinghelli and Antonio di Bernardo de' Medici to Filippo both referred to her absence from Florence. No letters to Filippo of the four years between this meeting and December 1463 have survived. It seems that after leaving Alessandra in San Quirico in 1460, Filippo may not have returned to Naples immediately. The war between France and Naples continued and he may well have remained for some time in Rome, where Niccolò di Lionardo was established in business.

It is difficult to establish patterns in the earlier correspondence with the many breaks of differing lengths which interrupt the sequences. However, the letters written approximately every two weeks between December 1463 and February 1466, provide a most fruitful contribution to understanding the events leading to the return of the Strozzi brothers to Florence. They also depict an interesting insight into the manipulative

71Ibid., L21, Note A, p227, Niccolò Ardinghelli wrote that Alessandra 'ebbe la consolazione di abbracciare a San Quirico il suo Filippo, che per fuggire i tumulti del Regno, si era ridotto a Roma.'
behaviour of all concerned.

This final group of forty-two (42) letters show that Alessandra’s two over-riding concerns had become the provision of suitable Florentine wives for her sons and their return to their native city, probably in that order. The remote possibility of her joining them in Naples arose, but the continuing political problems increased Alessandra’s determination to find suitable wives for her sons and this search took place concurrently with the efforts to have them returned from exile.

Repatriation remained a continuing theme in all the later letters, although Alessandra showed signs of pessimism from time to time about the outcome of the machinations of the Signoria. The simultaneous struggle to find wives is described in considerable detail, offering firsthand insight into the delicate balance which had to be maintained between the families involved in such transactions. The vital question of Filippo’s marriage was broached specifically when Tommaso, who was a businessman, was instructed to discuss potential wives with Filippo.72 Alessandra devoted one 1500-word letter to a proposed marriage for Filippo with Caterina, the daughter of Francesco Tanagli. In the event, after protracted negotiations, she and Marco were unable to achieve a satisfactory conclusion owing to the intransigence of the father.73 Somewhat emotionally, she wrote that while she was able to take comfort from the prosperity of her sons, her

72 Ibid., L30, p287 ‘Ancora da Tommaso sentirai come, ragionando co lui di volerti dar donna, egli è uomo da fatti, e presto te n’ebbe una in pratica, e andolla a vedere per recartene novelle.’

73 Ibid., L52, pp463-8. In this letter Alessandra discussed the different girls who might be available for her sons, the names of those recommending them, and the points in their favour or against them.
greatest wish was to see them married and to see their children before she died. 74

Alessandra accounted accurately for the taxes, the excise duties and the costs of cartage and she recorded equally accurately the deaths and illness in her own family, the Strozzi parentado and in the city. The accuracy of her reporting is supported by recent investigation by historians into the communal records of the deaths and of taxes. This very accuracy rendered her letters a particularly valuable source of information for Filippo in his absence.

The content of Alessandra Strozzi's letters is wide-ranging, and examination of the major topics covered demonstrates their value as a social document of a twenty-five year period. During the highly significant political events of 1465, Alessandra found the time to write the longest letter in the collection. 75 This was almost entirely devoted to the affairs of Giovanni Bonsi, and demonstrates that her interest in her daughters continued throughout her life. 76

The fifteenth-century cultural Renaissance, (a term not applied to the period until the nineteenth century), failed to include Alessandra in its orbit of influence, since she omitted to mention any literature or paintings, or the Brunelleschi dome of the cathedral, although she certainly attended the

74 Ibid., L64, p542, 'E non è dubbio che i'ne piglio conforto assai, quando sento che del bene e delle prosperità che v'ha concesse Iddio,'

75 Ibid., L66, pp563-568. This letter contains 2500 words, more than twice the 1200 word average of this collection.

76 See chapters on Affective Bonds and on Finances.
church, and could probably see it from her home. Filippo finally returned to Florence in November 1466. Unfortunately there is no letter to commemorate the end of Alessandra’s long period of suffering with the return of Filippo to Florence in November 1466.

The remarkable letters of a remarkable woman maintained the concept of a united family for her sons through her constant encouragement, which undoubtedly contributed to their ultimate financial success. She ensured that they were able to make satisfactory marriages in spite of the political handicap of their exile. She further helped to motivate them in their ultimate return through regular reports of the political situation in Florence. Alessandra’s comments on the political scene there and in particular, on the politics of the turbulent 1460’s, make these letters the more remarkable containing, as they do, the opinions of a woman in a period in which such opinions were neither sought nor regarded as significant.

77Ibid., L51, pp458-9. ‘Avvisoti, che andando domenica mattina a l’avemmaria in Santa Liperata alla prima messa,...’ The Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore had been built on the site of the church of Santa Reparata, a former patron saint of Florence.
Lucretia de Medicis (Torina Buoni)

1446

Alessandra Struzzi
1445

Odonate di giacomo di siro si ripagato alla quale già perquesta intera.

Benedetta di san martino di todi 6 Febbraio 1472

Benedetta e soprattutto buono dopo la breve e successiva

qui requien urbana negoza officio sibi protrassem, que etiam illi nullem prestar


29: Florence, Lawr. 49, 24, fol. 128r. Poggio, 1425, CE. p. 43.

From Cullman
CHAPTER TWO: I

POLITICS

Alessandra Strozzi's aim was to secure the return of her sons to Florence to assume what she believed to be their rightful place. The success of this was made infinitely more difficult by the extension of her husband's sentence of exile to the sons. Yet the persistent widow and her eldest son, Filippo, were determined to achieve the apparently impossible, to have the edict of prohibition rescinded. Complete rescission of the ban was essential, for the dishonour associated with exile which would always remain with them, would prevent their achieving the political status essential to a Quattrocento Florentine merchant banker. Such opprobrium could also preclude the acquisition of a suitable wife with honourable parentado, for a patrician marriage alliance in Florence depended not only on wealth and antiquity of family but also on political status.  

The major problem which Alessandra had to overcome was her virtual exclusion, as a woman, from participation in the political arena of Florence. In addition, the Strozzi lineage was politically contaminated following the Medicean coup of 1434, leaving her with little help from a very limited parentado. Exile had long been a traditional punishment for political dissidents in Florence and other Italian city-states, although differing rules

defined the legal bounds of exile for each city. Execution had formerly been the most extreme punishment but in the fifteenth century, banishment to a distant city was the sentence most frequently imposed by the ruling regime as punishment for dissidents. Serious disruption of families and businesses occurred when property was confiscated by the state, large cash guarantees were demanded and commercial transactions with their own city were forbidden to the exiles. Limitations were set which did not allow the exile to approach within a certain distance of the home state for a designated period, sometimes indefinitely.

Alessandra Strozzi gained her own experience of exile in following her husband, Matteo di Simone, when he was banished to Pesaro in 1434, although this was not her only acquaintance with exile. Her mother was an Alberti and at the beginning of the century all the men of the lineage had been sentenced to exile, a sentence which lasted over twenty-five years. Alessandra’s husband had shown


3A M Strozzi, Lettere di una Gentildonna fiorentina del secolo xvi ai Figliuoli esuli, C Guasti (Ed), Sansoni, Firenze, 1877 and reprinted by Licosa, 1972, Proemio, pxi, ‘Matteo Strozzi fu anche obbligato a dar mallevadore per duemila fiorini.’ See also chapter on Finances.

4Starn, Contrary Commonwealth, pp12-14, for limitations on approaching native city.

5S F Baxendale, ‘Exile in Practice: The Alberti Family In and Out of Florence 1401-1428’ Renaissance Quarterly, Vol 44, No 4, 1991, pp 720-756. ‘In January 1401, all Alberti men were exiled from the city of Florence, for conspiracy against the state;’ p720. The sentence lasted for 27 years, a potentially catastrophic situation for this
little enthusiasm for political matters before the 1433 coup which led to the exile of the Medici, although he had held offices of medium rank in the circuit of the Florentine Republic. The coup of the Albizzi in 1433 apparently encouraged Matteo to take a greater interest in political activities which were formerly clandestine, and of which little is known even now. It is known that Matteo joined

prominent banking family.

6Strozzi, Lettere, C Guasti (Ed), Proemio px, Matteo served the Republic in various offices including the supervision of the Dieci di Balia for several years and in 1433 he was ambassador to Francesco Sforza. Vespasiano da Bisticci, 'Vita di Matheo di Simone degli Istrozi Seguitur' Vita, Firenze, 1976, pp221-224. Cited in a footnote from Lorenzo di Filippo, Le Vite illustri della Casa degli Strozzi, 'Matteo di Simone degli Strozzi, cugino di Palla di Noferi (1397-1439) prese parte alla vita pubblica, andò ambasciatore in Romagna e presso Francesco Sforza, nonostante la sua neutralità fu inviato in esilio dopo il ritorno dei Medici nel 1434, a Pesaro, dove morì.' Unfortunately, Lorenzo’s work is inaccurate in many areas and therefore not reliable. Martines, Social World, p334 'Matteo was in the circuit of offices of medium rank'. D Kent, 'Reggimento', Renaissance Quarterly, p581, 'all citizens associated with the Priorate could claim to be in the reggimento or stato, some had a larger share of it than others.

7Dale Kent, The Rise of the Medici, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978, pp8-9, 'Knowledge of this period and of the forces which precipitated the power struggle is seriously limited by ignorance of the partisan substructure of the period', and Giovanni Cavalcanti is said to be the only contemporary chronicler prepared to write of the opposing clandestine parties of Cosimo de’ Medici and Rinaldo degli Albizzi. For Matteo’s ambivalence, see ibid., p63, from Mariotto Davanzati, a friend of the Medici; p184, Neri di Gino Capponi, Antonio di Giovanni Barbadori and Biagio Guasconi, all of whom were anti-Medicean; and Matteo maintained his friendship with both the Guicciardini brothers, Piero and Giovanni; Piero a Medicean supporter and Giovanni anti-Medicean. Also
messer Palla di Nofri Strozzi and Rinaldo degli Albizzi in their failed attempt to prevent entry to the palace by the pro-Medicean Priors elected for September 1434. It was for this reason that the successful Medici faction imposed a sentence of exile on Matteo, who died in Pesaro just two years later.

Matteo di Simone’s business interests in Florence had been closely involved with his first cousins, Iacopo di Lionardo and Iacopo’s brothers, Niccolo and Filippo. It has been suggested that these cousins had gone into ‘voluntary exile’ to avoid further involvement with Matteo when his increasing interest in political affairs became known. Political odium was apt to spread widely through the parentado after the exile of members of the family and reputations could be irreparably damaged by relationship or friendship with political outcasts. It was, therefore, fortunate for Alessandra and her sons that these cousins had had sufficient political foresight to have moved their

note Matteo’s failure ‘to come into line with the rest of our friends’ in a letter from Matteo’s friend, Biagio Guasconi, cited on p184.

8Kent, The Rise of the Medici, p330, Donato Velluti had joined Rinaldo degli Albizzi, with several other men and Matteo Strozzi ‘had met together in the palace of the Priors...to prevent the Priors from entering’.

9R Goldthwaite, Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence: A Study of Four Families, University Press, Princeton, 1968, pp36-7 for the business association between Matteo di Simone and his cousins. See also chapter on Finances.

10H Gregory, ‘The Return of the Native: Filippo Strozzi and Medicean Politics’, Renaissance Quarterly, Vol 38, No 1, 1985, p3. However it seems likely that these cousins had left Florence before the eruption of the dispute between the factions of the Albizzi and the Medici.
commercial enterprises away from Florence before Matteo was exiled. Alessandra was able to make arrangements for her eldest son, Filippo to leave Florence in 1441 to take up a position with these cousins, although he had not yet become eligible to inherit his father's sentence of exile. It seems probable that the decision to send the two elder sons away at age thirteen was the possible imminent extension of the sentence of exile to include them, rather than the imposition of the head tax. The slightly premature departure also gave the family the opportunity to choose the place of ultimate exile. Alessandra's well-founded fear that the original punishment of her husband, Matteo, would be extended to apply to his sons proved not without substance. It was to be some years before the Medicean regime demonstrated its continued distrust of this particular branch of the Strozzi family, and in December 1458 the sentences of the 1434 exiles were extended to include Matteo's sons. Yet the appointment, three years earlier, of Filippo di Matteo Strozzi as an authorised agent for the Medici Bank in Naples had possibly led Alessandra to expect that her sons would be free to return to Florence.

D Herlihy and C Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, Yale, 1985, pp138-40, claim that the head tax was imposed at age 18. S F Baxendale, 'Exile in Practice:' Renaissance Quarterly, p721. 'Depending on the circumstances, some or all of the punishments were imposed upon those convicted and sometimes upon members of their family as well.' At age 14 sons might inherit their father's punishment and debts.

N Rubinstein, The Government of Florence under the Medici: 1434 to 1494, Oxford, 1966, p109, '...in extending the sentences of the exiles of 1434, and banishing their sons and descendants, the Mediceans revealed a sense of mistrust which had already become apparent in the security measures....any organized opposition against the regime would find allies among these men and their families.'
after the expiry of the initial twenty-five year ban on their father. 13 In fact, this particular move by the Medicean faction to extend the ban, may have been specifically intended to prevent Filippo di Matteo, now aged thirty and well on the way to achieving a position of wealth and influence in Naples, from attaining political power. 14 Although Matteo’s sons had not been included in the 1444 extension of the original ten-year sentences, the electoral revision of 1458 enabled the Otto di Guardia to extend banishment to the sons of those who had been prominent in the previous regime. Alessandra had always been aware of this possibility and her all-too-close experience of Florentine political exile was responsible for a letter just before the ban, in which she discussed the possibility of joining her sons in Naples. 15 The imposition of the ban forced her to think seriously about her longheld ambition to have her sons return to Florence and to contemplate, if only briefly,

13 R de Roover, The Rise and Decline of the Medici Bank, University Press, Harvard, 1963, Table 26, p129. ‘Filippo Strozzi & Co’ was one of three firms appointed as correspondents and listed by the Medici in 1455.

14 R Starn, Contrary Commonwealth:, 1982, p98. ‘To allow exiles to return was possibly a dangerous expedient, but it could be a display of magnanimity or to lure exiles away from their companies abroad.’ See chapter on Affective Bonds in which it is suggested that the Medici themselves may have assisted in increasing Filippo’s wealth and power. The Kingdom of Naples had joined Florence recently in an alliance with Milan which had been keenly sought by Cosimo de’ Medici; and his son, Piero, continued to woo the King, sending his son Lorenzo to Naples, with the significant gift of a galley for the King, given under the auspices of Filippo Strozzi, clearly a move of appeasement.

settling all her affairs and joining them. This was, however, a brief aberration only on Alessandra’s part, and from this time she observed political changes even more closely and she also sought the advice of those Strozzi remaining in Florence.\textsuperscript{16}

Before the 1434 Medicean coup, the Strozzi had been one of the largest, wealthiest and most powerful families in a society in which long-held wealth was undoubtedly the most significant factor in the determination of political power. This large lineage included many of the principal citizens, not of the Strozzi name, who by marriage provided useful connections. It was the network of amici, vicini and parenti formed by these relationships which later enabled Alessandra to maintain a close connection with political movements in Florence, as none of the Strozzi remaining in Florence after 1434 was closely related to her husband. Matteo’s parents and his only sibling had predeceased him and Alessandra’s own brothers were neither wealthy nor powerful. Furthermore, the most influential and wealthy Strozzi, Messer Palla di Nofri, named in Matteo’s will as a guardian for Matteo’s children, was also exiled in 1434.\textsuperscript{17} Only Antonio di Benedetto Strozzi, who remained in Florence and was drawn for the Priorate in 1450, sixteen years after

\textsuperscript{16} D Kent, The Rise of the Medici, p357. In fact, only four of the very numerous Strozzi were exiled in 1434, although many of those remaining would not have been useful as advisers, as they were from impoverished and insignificant branches of the lineage.

\textsuperscript{17} H Gregory, A Florentine Family in Crisis, unpublished doctoral thesis, London, 1980, Table 1, p209, messer Palla di Nofri Strozzi was Matteo’s third cousin once removed, and was an immediate neighbour of Matteo di Simone and his wife, Alessandra.
the 1434 coup, was acceptable to the Medici regime. He was one of two members of the Strozzi family able to continue serving as an adviser to Alessandra while discharging his duties in office, and the other was Antonio's nephew Francesco, who was drawn in 1452. 18

Alessandra's natal family, the Macinghi, were neither politically active nor wealthy, and owing to internecine quarrels over inheritance, were not able or willing to help the young widow. Niccolo Soderini, husband of Alessandra's half-sister, Ginevra, and members of his family were prominent in the Medicean regime. 19 She did not hold Niccolo Soderini in high esteem, despite his holding office in government, after the litigation which arose from his involvement with her Macinghi uncles and cousins on the disposition of her father's estate, the outcome of which was unfavourable to Alessandra. Niccolo was almost certainly a useful source of information, having held office in the Priorate on many occasions, and Alessandra made frequent references to Ginevra, his wife, with whom she was in close contact. Caterina, her other half-sister was married to Giorgio di Francesco Canigiani, members of whose family also held office in the Republic.

Alessandra Strozzi had no alternative but to pursue her interest in the political life of Florence from a distance. Women were not enfranchised in the fifteenth century and therefore were neither eligible for political office nor able

18Gregory, Florentine Family, p209. According to Dr Gregory's Genealogical Table 1, previously cited, Antonio di Benedetto was sixth cousin once removed to Matteo di Simone.

19Rubinstein, The Government of Florence, p23. Soderini was first elected to the Signoria in 1444.
to take an active role in the political life. This did not mean that women had no interest in, or understanding of, politics. Although not allowed to participate in political affairs, Alessandra developed a familiarity with the procedures of government which enabled her to provide Filippo with details of political matters and of the changes taking place throughout his years of exile. Her letters refute the concept of a merely passive role for women in public life and in the family which had been perpetuated in a treatise written in the Quattrocento on the ideal life for a Florentine family.20

Martines claims that Alessandra had only a primitive understanding of policies, while conceding that she was probably intelligent and reliable, with a view of politics close to reality.21 The same writer also posited a greater interest in domestic and maternal matters than politics on her part, with little comprehension of political affairs, although accepting that as a propertied widow, Alessandra was subject 'to a fickle and intimidating system'.22 To deal with this intimidating system Alessandra developed a wide understanding of the Florentine political system and her letters, particularly of the final two years of exile, disclose that this


21L Martines, 'A Way of Looking at Women in Renaissance Florence', The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1974, (4), p26, 'none but the most rudimentary conception of policies or impersonal processes'.

knowledge was by no means limited to her personal involvement.\textsuperscript{23}

Alessandra's awareness of political influence was apparent in the first of the letters in which she described offices held by members of the family of Marco Parenti, whom she had approved as a husband for her daughter Caterina.\textsuperscript{24} Marco possessed only two of the requisites sought in a husband, his family's involvement in the Priorate and their wealth, but they could not claim antiquity of birth. In spite of his marriage to the daughter of a political exile, Marco himself was elected to the Priorate in 1454 although his name was removed from the purses after political upheaval in 1455.\textsuperscript{25} Notwithstanding his relegation, Marco was able to maintain his acquaintance with the principal citizens of the city, both within the Medici sphere and without. These citizens included such influential men as Agnolo Acciaiuolo and Dietisalvi Neroni, who had been Marco's friends for many years. Marco remained Alessandra's most useful and enduring source of information although he himself was never again actively involved in government at the highest

\textsuperscript{23}Rubinstein, \textit{The Government of Florence}, in this definitive work on Florentine Government, cited Alessandra's letters in support of his argument on pp139, 147n, 115n, 152, 158n, 163 and 174. Alessandra Macinghi-Strozzi is the only woman listed in the index to Rubinstein's work and the references include direct quotations from her letters.

\textsuperscript{24}Strozzi, \textit{Lettere}, L1, pp3-4 and footnotes, 'e hanno un poco di stato, ch'è poco tempo che'1 padre fu di Collegio.'

\textsuperscript{25}Rubinstein, \textit{The Government of Florence}, p45 and Phillips, \textit{The Memoir of Marco Parenti}, pp63-5. Throughout the Medicean regime from 1434 until 1494, the electoral system was frequently manipulated unconstitutionally to the advantage of the regime.
Alessandra demonstrated that she understood the Florentine political process in many letters in which she recorded the intrigues and the changes in the Medicean regime with the new leader, Piero di Cosimo de' Medici, following the death of Cosimo. She described the unconstitutional manipulation of the political system which took place when the names of relatives of the exiled Strozzi were removed from the electoral purses; this could only occur when drawing names *a mano* and had not been usual when names were drawn from sealed purses. This hand-drawing ensured pre-arranged results and the continued dominance of the Medici faction, and this was one of the more serious problems with which Alessandra Strozzi had to contend.  

Alessandra carefully managed the family estate to ensure the preservation of her small income for her sons, and she always understood that she would have to make use of every possible stratagem to retain control of her property under the burdensome taxation laws implemented in a city in which government, finance, taxes and litigation were inextricably linked. Her earliest personal involvement with the government of Florence was through the taxes levied on her meagre income by the

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26Ibid., p101 and p119. Marco also took on the duty of dealing with Luca Pitti, who had formerly been one of Cosimo's chief supporters.

27Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence*, p20. The traditional system of election by lot was restored in 1449, but in 1452 the Accoppiatori elected the Gonfalonier of Justice *a mano*, and a few months later the Balia extended this to include election *a mano* to the Priorate. Clearly such an election method gave the Accoppiatori control over the constitution of the Signoria.

28See chapter in this study on Alessandra's management of her financial affairs.
Commune from the time of her return to the city as a widow. It is obvious that the Florentine commune was in no way reluctant to deal directly with a woman; for example, she herself had to deal with the officials who harassed her for the payment of taxes.\(^2\) She also came under the close scrutiny of the Otto di Guardia, the council responsible for the supervision of the exiles.\(^3\) It was of this oppressive Council that Alessandra wrote to Lorenzo in describing the limitations on approaching the Florentine environs and on correspondence.\(^4\)

When the intransigent Medicean regime extended the ban to include her sons, Alessandra’s involvement in Florentine politics quickly escalated. She kept her sons informed of the results of the sortition for the Signoria, since those elected to the Priorate had considerable power to help citizens in need of assistance. Alessandra herself had sought the help of Tommaso Soderini, on the occasion of the initial legal action on her father’s estate. He was one of the leading citizens of the regime, and a relative of Niccolò Soderini. It was Niccolò who acted for her Macinghi nephews in the legal action to recover the property bequeathed

\(^2\) Strozzi, *Lettere*, L1, pp6-7, ‘e sono istata molestata da no’meno di quattro Ufici che hanno a riscuotere pel Comune:’

\(^3\) Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence*, p110. The Medicean regime, in its determination to prevent any return to political life of those involved in the 1434 coup, had the Otto di Guardia appointed for a term of two years in 1458, a term then extended unconstitutionally for a further five years.

her by her brother Zanobi in 1452.\textsuperscript{32}

Alessandra's views on the value of money and how it should be used appear to have changed by 1464. Despite the limited means of the family, she recommended that her sons make suitable gifts to the ambassadors, to honour them with friendship and to encourage them to support the Strozzi cause. In working towards the lifting of the ban on her sons, she now clearly perceived the value of money to be in its power to purchase influence rather than material benefits, although the apparent value was often in the material benefits.\textsuperscript{33} Alessandra's shrewd assessment of the ambassadors to Naples showed her understanding of their family connections and political backgrounds and of their likely ability to make changes in the position of the Strozzi.\textsuperscript{34} She had received a condolence letter from messer Giannozzo Pandolfini, the ambassador to Naples, after the death of her son Matteo, which expressed admiration for Filippo, and gave her a more optimistic outlook for his future.\textsuperscript{35} She

\textsuperscript{32}Strozzi, Lettere, L18, p198, 'A questo pigliero consiglio da Tommaso, che duo di fa torno d'ufficio:' See also Rubinstein, The Government of Florence, p127 for definition of Tommaso Soderini as a 'leading personality'.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid., L43, p375, 'Marco Parenti, per suo'parte e mia, t'ha loro offerto, se per te si puó fare di costá alcuna cosa per loro, se te n'avvisino, e fara'lo volentieri.' and ibid., L45 p396, 'Mona Lucrezia di Piero veggo t'ha scritto buona lettera per amore del lino.'

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., L43, pp374-375, 'fu fatto per la Comunità embasciatori costá alla Maestá del Re e al Duca di Melano, che è Dietisalvi; e costá e messer Luigi Guicciardini e Pandolfo di messer Giannozzo Pandolfini,'

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., L17, pp182-3, 'Da messer Giannozzo ho per sua benignità una lettera, che n'ho preso assa'conforto,'
encouraged Filippo to cultivate such influential friends in Naples, especially the ambassadors, who were chosen by the ruling regime and their friendship was keenly sought for the influence which they could wield. Filippo clearly needed little urging in this. He was already acting as financial adviser to the King of Naples and enjoyed friendship with the Florentine ambassador, Bonaccorso Pitti. This also gave Alessandra considerable satisfaction and hope, knowing the esteem in which both Bonaccorso and his father were held.  

Alessandra also noted with pleasure Lorenzo’s friendship with Bernardo de’ Medici, ambassador to Milan, whom he ‘loved as a brother’. She was delighted by a visit from Montelupo, a young man in the retinue of ambassador Piero de’ Pazzi, who came to pay tribute to Lorenzo, although she reminded Lorenzo that in Florence it was said that it did not pay to support the Pazzi. Such friendships were also promoted by Marco Parenti in Florence in retaining his acquaintance with the influential citizens of the city.

Alessandra and Filippo encouraged Marco to continue to concentrate his attention on the cittadini principali, members of the innermost circle of Cosimo de’ Medici which included Agnolo Acciaiuoli and Dietisalvi di Dietisalvi; by 1463 these men were themselves becoming disillusioned.

36 Ibid., L26, p254, ‘È Bonaccorso molto estimato si per la virtù sua e per rispetto del padre.’

37 Ibid., L26, p256, ‘Piacemi...che tu v’amiate come frategli;’

38 Ibid., L26, p256, ‘Ricordoti, secondo sento, che chi sta co’ Medici sempre ha fatto bene, e co’ Pazzi el contrario,...’ Note B to the same letter records that the truth of the saying was confirmed 15 years later when Pazzi’s son was hanged from the Palazzo Vecchio.
with Cosimo, who was by now an old and sick man. Unfortunately Dietisalvi, who had been described as Cosimo’s ‘greatest and most ambitious enemy’ and therefore a likely supporter of Filippo’s cause, was also in ill-health.\textsuperscript{39} Messer Agnolo Acciaiuoli was also believed to be well-disposed towards Filippo, but unfortunately he had recently been out of favour with the Medici.\textsuperscript{40} Alessandra felt that Dietisalvi, a friend of Filippo, should be consulted and her sons-in-law, Marco Parenti and Giovanni Bonsi, urged Alessandra to speak with Acciaiuoli herself. This refutes the argument that a woman could not directly approach the principal citizens.

Marco Parenti had held the strong belief that constitutional government would be restored within days of the death of Cosimo de’ Medici on August 1, 1464, as he wrote in his own \textit{Memoir}.\textsuperscript{41} Alessandra had also become cautiously optimistic that there could be significant changes in the government after the death of Cosimo. However, in the confusion that ensued after the assumption of power by his son Piero, it seemed that constructive changes were unlikely and that Alessandra and the citizens of Florence were destined to remain in a state of insecurity for more than a year. The constitutional

\textsuperscript{39}Rubinstein, \textit{The Government of Florence}, p134, cites Nicodemo da Pontremoli to Francesco Sforza in August 1463, ‘Cosimo e li soy non hanno qui maiore ne più ambitioso inimico che Dietisalvi.’

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., L36, p324. See Note C, p329 - Guasti (ed) considered that this information showed Alessandra to be very well informed.

\textsuperscript{41}Phillips, \textit{The Memoir of Marco Parenti.}, p3. ‘...these memoirs, which we began at the death of Cosimo de’ Medici in the belief that in the future it would be our task to write about the affairs of a free city and of men who would become better citizens because they were tired of the servitude of previous times.’
crisis achieved nothing and Alessandra commented shrewdly on the concomitant financial disasters in the city and on the changes occurring in the minds of the citizens following Cosimo’s death.\textsuperscript{42} The King of Naples made a direct appeal in May 1465 to Piero di Cosimo on behalf of the Strozzi and Filippo wrote of this appeal to Luca Pitti, who discussed it with Marco Parenti.\textsuperscript{43} Although he held the King in high esteem, Piero indicated that it was not yet time for their return.\textsuperscript{44} Despite this setback, Piero wrote to Filippo in friendly terms, addressing him familiarly as ‘brother’, which Alessandra felt indicated a possible change of heart by the Medici towards the Strozzi. Ties between the Medici and the Strozzi appeared to be gradually strengthening and Alessandra was able to accept such apparent change in loyalty when driven by increasing urgency for the return of her sons.

Filippo was almost certainly acting in Naples on behalf of the Medici at this time and it is even possible that a timetable had already been decided between Piero and Filippo, with the return of the

\textsuperscript{42}Strozzi, Lettere, L36, p323 - ‘Non è dubbio che gli animi d’alquanti cittadini per la morte seguita non abbino fatto in tra loro nuovi pensieri del governo della terra;’ Rubinstein, The Government of Florence, p141 wrote that it would be a mistake to accept the official version that few citizens were involved in the attempt to overthrow Piero di Cosimo, and cited Alessandra Strozzi’s letter quoted above in support of his argument.

\textsuperscript{43}Strozzi, Lettere, L46, Note B, pp415-416, ‘Ma bisognava preparare il terreno co Piero de’Medici e con Luca Pitti, le due potenze che allora si contenevano, e quindi impedivano il bene comune’.

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., L46, p414, Note A, letter from Piero di Cosimo to the King of Naples, ‘Ho un’altra lettera dalla M.ta V., per la quale veggo con quanta instantia ne richiedete per Phylippo e Lorenzo Strozzi: emi molesto, che quello ne richiedete, non è in mia potestà;’
exiles the price for political and financial negotiations with the Neapolitan King.\textsuperscript{45} There is no concrete evidence to support such an argument, merely the almost inexplicable sequence of events which led to the return of the exiles a little more than a year later. Although Alessandra may have been aware of these arrangements, they would certainly not have been committed to paper. Despite disappointments, the Strozzi continued to court Piero de' Medici as Alessandra recognised the need to maintain the tenuous hold on his favours, and was therefore delighted when Filippo sent him an unsolicited gift of oranges; this gift was reciprocated when Piero asked Filippo to look after his son Lorenzo on a visit to Naples, which must have seemed the ultimate honour. She appreciated a further honour accorded Filippo when he was given the task of making the presentation of a gift from Piero to the King. Piero's wife, Lucrezia Tornabuoni, also wrote to Filippo in friendly terms.

Alessandra continued to hope that the King of Naples would assist their cause and was always prepared to turn any event to her advantage. She had hoped to gain some political advantage from a State visit to Florence in June 1465 by the daughter of the Duke of Milan on her way to her marriage with the King's son Alfonso, but in the end, nothing was achieved as the costly visit was not popular with the Florentine citizens.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{45}See footnote 13 above. See also chapter on Alessandra's finances for discussion of the possibility that Piero de' Medici and Filippo Strozzi had reached some secret compromise.

\textsuperscript{46}Strozzi, Lettere, p420 and Note A, p423. 'La Donna novella, e questi Signori s'aspettano fra cinque o sei dì. Essi messo in ordine di belle feste per onorargli, e una grande ispesa si dice che fia questa; che assa'gente se ne duole:'

51
Having gained a little ground, Alessandra and Marco Parenti were seriously displeased to learn in October 1465 of Lorenzo's appointment to the post of Consul for the Florentine merchants in Naples.\(^4^7\) They believed that such a nomination could only militate against rescission of the ban. Alessandra was sure that the citizens would not be happy to have Lorenzo Strozzi acting as consul in view of the sensitivity of Florentines to those politically tainted. She wrote with some vehemence that the family needed goodwill, not hostility, and asked him to renounce the honour.\(^4^8\) Aware that the future of the Strozzi was finely balanced at the time, Alessandra understood that just such a seemingly minor matter did not accord with the delicate art of accepting the terms of exile and could adversely affect the outcome of their affairs.\(^4^9\)

The death of Pandolfo Pandolfini death which occurred at this time was another serious setback, for as ambassador to Naples as well as a member of the Strozzi parentado, he would have strongly supported their cause. Despite these disadvantages, Alessandra was beginning, by the middle of 1465, to feel a little more optimistic about the possibility of return.

The confusion caused by the recurring unconstitutional manipulation of the electoral processes, which was reported with Alessandra's customary acerbity and accuracy, continued in the

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\(^{47}\)Ibid., L56, Note C, (Ed. Guasti) p496 'La Nazione fiorentina in Napoli si era eletta per Console Lorenzo Strozzi; dispiacendo a Firenze, che avesse scelto per l'appunto un esule.'

\(^{48}\)Ibid., L56, p493. '...che avete bisogno di grazia e non di nimicizia!'

\(^{49}\)Starn, Contrary Commonwealth, p102. 'Even exiles owed the political community their allegiance and obedience. The old art of returning home thus became an art of accepting the terms of exile.'
year after Cosimo’s death. She believed that the proposal to revert to the traditional method of sealing the purses, at this particular time, rather than drawing the names of candidates by hand, could hinder rather than help the Strozzi cause, although Filippo held the reverse opinion on this occasion. However, the confusion continued and Alessandra wrote that all the citizens were discussing the changes in the scrutiny.

Alessandra’s brother-in-law, Niccolò Soderini, achieved the highest possible office when he was elected Gonfalonier of Justice in November 1465 during this continuing constitutional crisis. Niccolò had promised electoral reforms which Alessandra and many of the citizens of Florence believed would make him a successful Gonfalonier of Justice. This optimism was sadly unfounded, both for Alessandra and the city, and Alessandra’s earlier faith in the weak Soderini was clearly unjustified for even the guildsmen, major and minor,

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50 Ibid., L57, p498. ‘Della mutazione fatta del serrare le borse, certo che dà impaccio al fatto vostro.’

51 Ibid., L59, p512 ‘...tutti gli uomini sono in pensiero di quello che s’ha a fare in Palagio nel dirizzare lo Stato, e ’n che modo s’ha a vivere: e tutto di si pratica’. This was cited by Rubinstein, The Government of Florence, p147, in a footnote.

52 Rubinstein, Government in Florence, p146-9, Niccolo Soderini proposed a new scrutiny with major reforms of eligibility for office, supported by Dietisalvi and others. This was passed with a narrow majority in mid-November, 1465. The reconstitution of the Council ensured that free elections had been restored, but those eligible had been prominent under the Medicean regime. Opposition only gained strength at the end of December, after the end of Soderini’s term. Strozzi, Lettere, L58, p503 ‘la nuova Signoria è, come abbiano Gonfaloniere di giustizia Niccolò Soderini: che a Dio piaccia che faccia buono ufficio, e che sia la salute della terra.’
were said to be confused. Soderini himself was worried and he and his Signoria appeared indecisive and weak.\(^5\) His reputation was shattered by his failure while Gonfalonier of Justice to reform the methods of scrutiny.\(^5\) Indeed, Agnolo Acciaiuolo was prompted to write of him to Francesco Sforza in Milan in extremely unfavourable terms.\(^5\) Alessandra reported that he was a thoroughly demoralised man who even failed to have himself created Cavaliere at the end of his term.\(^5\) She had also hoped that while he was in office, he would use his influence to expedite the return of her sons.

Alessandra's hopes that the outcome of Soderini's term of office would be beneficial to her family were not justified. With almost twenty years of their exile yet to serve, hope of revocation of the ban appeared to have almost evaporated with the continuing constitutional disorder. The unabated crisis reminded Alessandra sadly of the 1434 coup which led to the rise of the Medici and the banishment of her husband.\(^5\) She came to believe that without harmony among those in government, it would not be possible to achieve the return of her sons and the other exiles, and so she longed for an

\(^5\)Ibid., L60, p520, 'E stanno come asino a gragnola:'

\(^5\)Ibid., L64, p540, 'E suto gran mancamento.'

\(^5\)Rubinstein, The Government of Florence, p154, cited A Acciaiuoli, ASM Pot est, Firenze, 272, 'questo gonfalonieri e una bestia' and again cited Acciaiuoli, Bibl. Ambros. 247, 'questo Gonfalonieri e una imprudente persona'.

\(^5\)Strozzi, Lettere, L63, p535, 'Rimase molto isbigottito, e ricevettene un gran cappellaccio.'

\(^5\)Ibid., L60, p520, 'che mi fa ricordare del '34.'
early solution.\textsuperscript{58} However, only partial resolution of the crisis was achieved but without the proposed changes in the scrutiny for the next Signoria. Alessandra’s hopes were then cautiously renewed with the election of Soderini’s successor, Francesco Bagnesi, whom she described as the opposite of Niccolò.\textsuperscript{59} It was during Bagnesi’s term of office that the bill on the scrutiny was finally passed in the face of considerable opposition.\textsuperscript{60}

Alessandra’s continued proximity to some of those at the centre of power demonstrates her political acumen as she ensured that she remained in a position to be able to report changes as they were being made.\textsuperscript{61} She was certainly close enough to hear that the Signoria had finally approved the new scrutiny and to write to Filippo on the actual day of decision. The scrutiny bill, although initially rejected by the Council of One Hundred, had been finally passed on February 1 after several days in secret council. Alessandra was somewhat amused by the relatively swift passage after all the trouble

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., L61, p524. ‘...che ogn’uomo attende a squittinarare. Iddio voglia che la ben vada, e che la terra istia en pace, o vero gli uomini: ch’è insino non è pace tra chi governa, non credo si ragioni di ristituire ne voi ne altri.’

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., L63, p538 ‘...è il contrario che Niccolo.’

\textsuperscript{60}Rubinstein, The Government of Florence, p152 for progress made on the changes in the scrutiny, again citing Strozzi, Lettere, L67, p564, ‘Essi vinto nel Consiglio del Popolo, questa mattina, quello che si vinse nel Cento; cioè di gittare a terra parte dello squittino fatto,...’

\textsuperscript{61}Rubinstein, The Government of Florence, footnote 6, p151, ‘Ha questa Signoria fatto parecchi di pratica, e nulla si può intendere: che hanno fatto pena di rubello a chi rivela nulla, a chi si trouva di questa pratica’. 

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that had been caused.\textsuperscript{62}

As a property owner and a taxpayer, however reluctant, it was essential in her own and her sons' interests that she appreciate fully the affairs of the city. A practical woman of great determination, she did not hesitate to form her own opinions and to adopt the singleminded approach to the political events which was a vital factor in the successful outcome of her campaign for the reinstatement of her sons in their native city.

Marriage was an important element in Florentine politics, and Alessandra demonstrated further her political awareness as she sought suitable wives for her sons. The ramifications of the parentado had to be balanced against the political handicap of exile by both sides of a proposed alliance. Few patrician families would welcome union with those in exile, while the latter could not afford to add to their already disadvantaged position. Very careful examination of the wide parentado of any proposed alliance was absolutely essential to eliminate any further impediment. It was necessary to ensure that there was no financial dishonour, as bankruptcy was common in the uncertain financial climate following Cosimo's death. Outstanding debts to the Commune and unpaid private accounts were also regarded as serious handicaps.\textsuperscript{63}

The need to find wives had become urgent following the extension of the sentence of exile to her sons. The death of her youngest son added to

\textsuperscript{62}Strozzi, Lettere, L67, p567-8. 'Si sono a di primo di febbraio, e sento che ieri si vinse alla prima la pitizione si misse nel Consiglio del Cento; e ne fu cagione che questi principali si sono rappacificati en pochi di ensieme: che è da ridersi de' fatti loro.'

\textsuperscript{63}See chapter on Finances for Matteo di Simone's very old debt.
Alessandra’s worry over the great risk to a family with only two sons to carry on the lineage.\textsuperscript{64} However, it was to be several years before mother and sons reached agreement on this vital matter. The continued political exile of her sons seriously handicapped them as potential husbands for patrician families with marriageable daughters, making the search for wives very difficult.

The complexities of seeking suitable marriage alliances required close attention be paid firstly to the physical properties of \textit{la mercatanzia}.\textsuperscript{65} It was necessary that a wife be well brought up, pleasing in appearance and without physical deformities. Physical attributes were very important and well-built girls, suited to the bearing of children, were keenly sought. Alessandra became rather desperate in the 1460s in her efforts to find suitable Florentine daughters-in-law and the factors involved were discussed in great detail in her letters. She pointed out that few appropriate girls were available and if they did not hurry the only girls who remained would be the physically handicapped.\textsuperscript{66}

The value of the dowry had to be agreed between

\textsuperscript{64}Strozzi, \textit{Lettere}, L17, p178. 'Per la qual cosa ho auto un'amaritudine grandissima dell'esser privata di tale figliuolo; e gran danno mi pare ricevere, oltre all'amore filiale, della morte sua; e simile voi due altri mia, che a piccolo numero ridotti.'

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., L35, p313. 'I’ho ’nteso el pensiero di 45 (Lorenzo) e come vole esser fatta la sua mercatanzia.'

\textsuperscript{66}Strozzi, \textit{Lettere}, L45, p394, '...perchè al continuo ci sarebbe degl’impacci e degli storpi di tormi questa venuta e questa consolazione di stare dove voi.' In L13, p145, Alessandra, referring to the marriage she arranged for Isabella di Iacopo Strozzi, who was shortsighted.
the parties, and this was a matter of a fine balance between pride and honour. Alessandra’s wealthy sons were not in need of a large dowry and those in exile had to be prepared to accept some compromise on this matter. Families would not wish the dowry to leave Florence if they hoped to regain it in the case of the death of the girl. The task of finding husbands for her daughters had required much more detailed attention to the question of dowry and had rendered the search somewhat more apparently mercenary but the intervening eighteen years had brought wealth to the sons. 67

In April 1465 Alessandra reported to Filippo that Tommaso Davizzi, the marriage broker, had found Francesco Tanagli’s daughter, Caterina, who had a suitable parentado and other good qualities, although her dowry would be small. 68 She learned of a beautiful Alberti girl whose family would probably allow her to marry one of the Strozzi and had also been told of a niece of the Bardi who was rather uncouth and awkward and therefore likely to be allowed to marry an exile. There are no further references to either of these girls and by the end of July Alessandra and Marco Parenti believed that they had won Francesco Tanagli’s daughter for Filippo, although the father remained uncompromising in his attitude. The daughters of Donato Adimari then became available and Alessandra was able to report that the Adimari were more noble than the Tanagli and the dowry was larger, although they had

67 See chapter on Finances for discussion of dowries for daughters.

68 Strozzi, Lettere, L45, p394-5. It was not yet known whether Tanagli would permit his daughter to go into exile.
Alessandra was satisfied that Caterina Tanagli would be suitable for Filippo who was then thirty-seven and that Fiammetta Adimari, who was younger than Caterina, would be suitable for Lorenzo. However, by the end of 1465, she was again bemoaning the great dearth of girls as the continued intransigence of Francesco Tanagli had brought negotiations to a halt. Then Alessandra caught a glimpse of Fiammetta Adimari and immediately decided that this lovely fourteen-year-old girl was to be Filippo's wife. After his restoration to his appropriate place in Florence in September 1466, he was married to Fiammetta, who bore him several children.

Alessandra's life was dominated by the political machinations in Florence from the time of her husband's banishment. In fact, in a society so obsessed with the achievement of political office through wealth and influence she could scarcely have failed to grasp the principles inextricably linking all aspects of Florentine life. Notwithstanding the handicaps under which she laboured, Alessandra managed her affairs and her property very astutely, demonstrating a knowledge which was by no means

69 Ibid., L49, Note B, pp448-51. The Adimari girls had no father or brothers only uncles and cousins who were unpleasant. This was using parentado in the narrow sense of the immediate male relatives only and not looking at the wider relationships.

70 Ibid., L53, p476, 'A me pare ci sia si' gran carestia di fanciulle.'

71 Ibid., L62, p530. 'E bella, e a me piace molto; che ha un bel viso, e bella persona:'

superficial.

Ultimately, Alessandra Strozzi's significant part in the restoration of her sons to full citizenship of the Commune of Florence, must be accepted. Her understanding of the political events in Florence was a vital factor in the successful outcome of her campaign.
CHAPTER TWO: II

LITIGATION

The citizens of Florence clearly accepted that women could continue to guide their own affairs if they had no husband or father, despite the 'supposed natural inferiority' of women claimed to lead to both legal and social inferiority.¹ As a result of this supposed inferiority, inaccurate census counts of females were commonplace, including inaccurate reporting of the ages of females, lower expenditure on the upkeep of female children and even abandonment of female infants.² However, women could provide very useful access to resources and material benefits through the parentado created by marriage.³ Also, in this age of early widowhood, since many women had no male to 'control' them and their children, the lineage was dependent on the women for the maintenance of the patrimony. A more

¹T Kuehn, "CUM CONSENSU MUNDUALDI": Legal Guardianship of Women in Quattrocento Florence', Viator, 13, 1982, pp309-33. p319, 'The supposed natural inferiority of women justified not only a legal inferiority but a social inferiority.' Kuehn also cites the misogynist works of the preacher Paolo da Certaldo, 'women should be kept at home, closely watched and never idle' and Leon Battista Alberti, saying that 'there was no true prudence or right counsel in a woman's head'.

²Ibid., p319.

³Strozzi, Lettere, L71, Note B, p596, 'E innanzi ti risponda a quella [lettera], dice che buom pro ti faccì della fanciulla ti nacquì ieri, come da Lorenzo se'avvisato. Parmi che avendone uno maschio, e visto tanto quant'egli è, che non meno ti debbi rallegrare di questa, sendo femina, che se fussi maschio: perché prima ne comincerei a trarre frutto che del maschio, cioè ne farai prima um bello parentado...'
recent study has established that in notarial
documents of the fourteenth century a 'great variety
of legal acts involving married and widowed women in
emancipations and subsequent contracts' were to be
found. Indeed, Alessandra Strozzi maintained
control of her own family affairs for over thirty
years. As in the political and financial areas, so
in the legal field women supposedly had no ability
to conduct their own legal matters, and consequently
'Florentine women were obliged by statute to have
some male associated with them in their legal
transactions.' However, a woman could act without
such a mundualdus if she had no relatives or
neighbours. It is clear that a propertied widow
with limited parentado, such as Alessandra Strozzi,
would have no choice but to answer for herself when
litigation was enacted against her. She had to

4Kuehn T, Law, Family & Women, University Press,

5T Kuehn, "Cum Consensu Mundualdi", Viator,
Kuehn says that unlike Florentine legal features,
'mundualdus' did not come from Roman law but its
provenance is 11th & 12th century Lombard, where it
referred to the power 'mundium', held by the
mundualdus. The mundium should not be confused with
the duty of care of parents and husbands. In the
same article, Kuehn also cites an early Bolognese
jurist as having said that women could enter into
contracts in their own name and did not need their
husband's consent.

6Ibid., p309, 'the results of a limited foray
into the subject of the 'mundualdus': what it
reveals about the role of women in Quattrocento
Florence.' See also previous footnote.

7Ibid., p318, quotes Antonio Strozzi (1455-1523)
as having said that a woman did not need a
mundualdus if she had no relatives or neighbours.

8Kuehn, Law, Family & Women, p198. Kuehn cites
Enrico Besta, Italian legal historian, who stated
that marriage automatically emancipated a woman from
patria potestas and legally she did not become
subject to her natal family again.
arrange her own legal representation and, if necessary, seek legal redress on her own account. Legal codes did not make gender distinctions and this absence of such distinction in the language of law has led to a continuing negative view of women.\textsuperscript{9} It was not customary for women to appear in court and while such an appearance was not contrary to any law, it was of sufficient rarity to attract attention.\textsuperscript{10} Despite having been involved in litigation relating to property and contracts on several occasions, nothing in the letters of Alessandra Strozzi suggests that a \textit{mundualdus} was appointed to act on her behalf.

The first legal matter to which Alessandra referred was the proposed sale of a small house adjoining her own, sequestered by the Commune from the estate of Palla di messer Nofri; this had been purchased by Niccolò Popoleschi who was now

\textsuperscript{9}C Calisse, \textit{A History of Italian Law}, translated by Layton B Register, Rothman Reprints, New York, 1969, Book III, Part 1, p519, 'Roman imperial law succeeded in placing woman in a condition not very unlike that of man, ...'. I Maclean, \textit{The Renaissance Notion of Woman}, Cambridge, 1980, '...all law recognizes...states in the life of woman which require special dispensation in law.' Maclean claims that these states are both physiological and marriage paradigms.

\textsuperscript{10}G Brucker, \textit{Giovanni and Lusanna - Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence}, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986. This study draws attention to a woman who had to take her appeal to the archiepiscopal court to establish the legitimacy of her marriage, where a verdict was awarded in her favour. She was called as a witness in her own case, as were six other women, although witnesses were interrogated privately in separate rooms in the archbishop's palace or in a nearby church. The original favourable verdict was eventually overturned on appeal to the Curial Court in Rome.
proposing to sell the property to Donato Rucellai. Alessandra knew that under Florentine law she was entitled to first refusal of purchase and that, as she was a neighbour, no sale could take place without her approval, but she herself was not in a position financially to buy the property.12

Alessandra’s acceptance of the responsibility for her brother Zanobi’s taxes and debts ultimately led to a longrunning legal battle with her natal family. A document drawn up by Antonio di Benedetto Strozzi just before Zanobi’s death left Alessandra his goods, as well as a farm which she later sold to messer Otto di Lapo Niccolini in 1454. In the matter of the disposition of Zanobi’s estate, Antonio Macinghi and his brother-in-law, Niccolò Soderini, sought to have the original agreement for the sale of the farm, changed. When the case came before the Signoria, the petition of the Macinghi was rejected by 22 votes to 11.13 It is possible that Filippo acted as mundualdus for his mother on this occasion, although he was never able to act in this capacity again, as the sentence of exile precluded his return to Florence before 1466. Marco

\[11\] Strozzi, Lettere., L4, p59. ‘Della casa di Donato Rucellai no s’è fatto nulla per questa morìa, che non ci è stato a Firenze: avvisandoti che l’è mie’compera, e nolla può tenere senza mia licenza; e a me non fugge termine, che ho tempo parecchi anni a comperalla:’

\[12\] Ibid., L2, pp37-8. The house was valued at 70 florins and was bringing 6 florins in rent. Alessandra would have bought it had she been able to afford it, but to do so, she would have to wait for Caterina’s dowry to mature in April 1450. She suggested that Filippo keep it in mind for when he returned to Florence, and in fact he was to buy it from Donato Rucellai in 1477, see L2, Note M, p44.

\[13\] Ibid., L4, Note A, pp62-64. These extracts come from Alessandra’s own Notebooks, in the Carte Stroziane, Carte 85 & 89.
Parenti was probably the only other suitable person but there is no reference by Alessandra to his having done so. Following the death without heirs of her half-brother, Antonio, the sons of Giovacchino and Carlo Macinghi claimed the estate of Filippo di Niccolò Macinghi (their uncle and Alessandra’s father), which would include the whole estate of Antonio and Zanobi as well as the proceeds of the sale of Zanobi’s farm.\textsuperscript{14} When, a year later, Alessandra was required to pay a penalty of 500 florins over the contract with messer Otto, it did not appear to cause her such distress as might have been expected.\textsuperscript{15} The ever pragmatic Alessandra had already had the benefit of the proceeds for the payment of taxes for several years, during a time of more urgent need.

She regularly sent contracts and documents to Naples to keep Filippo informed and to obtain his signature to give her the power of attorney necessary, when, for example, she wished to reinvest Leandra’s dowry.\textsuperscript{16} When the legal matter of a debt incurred by her husband arose, Alessandra was concerned that Filippo would not only inherit the debt but also the excommunication which could be imposed. Excommunication had wide and serious ramifications she consulted the notary in addition to the priest, and the issue was ultimately settled satisfactorily.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14}See Genealogical Table of Macinghi in chapter on Affective Bonds.

\textsuperscript{15}\textit{Ibid.}, L19, L20 and L21.

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, L40, p343, ‘Setevi apposti che, per le cose occorsero, e denari del Monte sono escemati; e se manderete la procura, la serberò:’

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, L39, p346, ‘Egli è parecchi mesi che quel pizzicagnolo di Borgo Sa’Lorenzo m’ha istimolata di nove fiorini aveva avere da vostro
In 1464, Alessandra decided to make her will to put her own affairs in order. She found herself in a quandary with regard to a universal heir as it was important that her property, in particular the family home, remain intact for her sons, who could not inherit Florentine property while in exile.\(^{18}\) In a complex legal arrangement, Alessandra nominated her younger daughter, Lesandra, as her heir and later added a codicil to ensure that on Lesandra’s death the estate would revert to Filippo and Lorenzo.\(^{19}\) This astute plan was also intended to circumvent the likelihood of Alessandra’s property being sequestrated by the State in the event of her sons being subject to further punishment. However no further penalty was ever imposed and Filippo Strozzi returned to Florence in 1466. Just two days before his mother’s death in 1472, Filippo recorded in his own notebook that Alessandra had annulled a will of June 1464 and all its codicils.\(^{20}\) It is obvious that it was not until she was very close to death that Alessandra finally relinquished control over her affairs.

It becomes apparent that in fact the influence of women in Alessandra’s position carried into many areas and that the legal implications of the control of women over their own property affected the Commune and its citizens quite significantly.

\(^{18}\) *Ibid.*, L30, p285, ‘vogliendo acconciare e fatti mia, truovo che, vogliendo fare testamento, non posso fare ch’io no lasci mia ereda universale:’

\(^{19}\) *Ibid.*, L35, Note A, pp317-321, for copy of Alessandra’s will of February 1454.

\(^{20}\) *Ibid.*, L35, Note A, p321. In Filippo’s notebook a memorandum dated February 28, 1472 (s.c.), ‘gia morta madonna Alessandra’, although in *ibid.*, Note B to Letter 72, p610 it is claimed that she died on March 2, 1472.
Women in Florence may have been seen to have lost their identity, with their name, on marriage, but that loss of identity certainly did not cocoon them from fields of influence, as Alessandra Strozzi demonstrated.
Alessandra Strozzi returned to Florence in 1437 as an impoverished young widow with five children. For almost thirty years, she concentrated her business acumen on managing estates severely diminished by the punitive impositions at the time of exile. Her responsibilities to ensure the heavy demands of taxation were met with minimal call on the capital with which she supported her sons and daughters, and helped her sons to build up their business abroad.

Alessandra was seriously disadvantaged politically as a result of the exile from Florence imposed on her husband, Matteo di Simone, in 1434, following the Medicean coup. Banishment as a punitive political measure was not new in Florence and had been frequently imposed in the fifteenth-century, with the sentence stipulating the place of exile and the length of confinement. A financial guarantee was usually required in the form of a bond and the property of the exile could be sequestrated by the state.\(^1\) This property could be sold at the will of the government to pay arrears of taxes and to repay debts, among which were included the dowries owed to the wives of exiled men.\(^2\)

\(^1\)A M Strozzi, Lettere di una Gentildonna fiorentina ai figliuoli esuli, (Ed. C Guasti), Sansoni, Firenze, 1877, L2, Note I, p43, ‘Messer Palla di Nofri Strozzi aveva le case attigue a quella di Matteo.’ Messer Palla’s property was confiscated when he was exiled and it was sold to Niccolo d’Ainolfo Popoleschi.

\(^2\)R Starn, Contrary Commonwealth: The Theme of Exile, University of California, Berkeley, 1982, pp112-4. The confiscation of property was recorded
At the time of his death in exile Matteo di Simone Strozzi's estate consisted of the family home in the parish of Santa Maria degli Ughi in the Quarter of Santa Maria Novella and an adjoining small house. He also owned a house, which was let, in the parish of San Lorenzo, and a wool shop at San Martino. In addition, there were several farms, and the total value of the estate was scarcely 4000 florins, approximately 2000 florins less than that of his father, Simone di Filippo Strozzi, who had died in 1424. Simone's estate had consisted of a house in Florence, other property valued at 2500 florins, goods worth 800 florins and a business investment of 1650 florins plus another 900 florins, probably in cash, to a total value of 5850 florins. As his only surviving son, Matteo inherited this whole estate, including houses, farms and a share in the wool shop.

Matteo himself died only twelve years after his father and less than two years after he was banished from Florence. On leaving Florence for Pesaro, he was obliged to leave his home and his sources of income. Conditions of exile were apparently varied

for the tax records by the officials of the Commune. See also S F Baxendale, 'Exile in Practice: The Alberti Family In and Out of Florence 1401-1428' Renaissance Quarterly, Vol 44, No 4, 1991, p720, 'Political exile punished an offending individual through public humiliation, deprivation of political rights, separation from family and friends, business and property.'

R Goldthwaite, Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence, Princeton, 1968, p51, footnote 41. Matteo di Simone's testament is held in the Carte Strozziane-v, 1250. Strozzi, Lettere, Proemio, (Ed) C Guasti, pxiv. The farms were at Quaracchi, Campi, San Cresci, Maciuoli and at Pozzolatico. Alessandra sold the farm at San Cresci on her return to Florence in 1437 and in 1446 she sold the house in via San Gallo, in the parish of San Lorenzo.

Tbid., Proemio, (Ed C Guasti) pxxiv-v.
according to the perceived severity of the political involvement and Matteo’s property was not confiscated although he was required to leave a guarantee of 2000 florins. The sale of his interest in the wool manufactory, in which he had been in partnership with his father’s cousins, may have provided this sum for the guarantee. Property could not be sold while the owner was in exile and it is possible that Matteo had divested himself earlier of his share in the wool business. However, in the absence of the owner, property could be used for profit by renting, and following the owner’s death, could be sold at any time.

When her husband died in 1436, Alessandra was not yet thirty, an age at which only 0.5% of household heads were women. In Quattrocento Florence, while it was possible for a woman to become the head of a household, this position was more usually achieved by a widow of relatively advanced age. Women were accepted in this unaccustomed role and there were few barriers to their carrying out all the necessary tasks associated with the management of the family and its

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5Ibid., footnote 4, pxi. ‘Matteo Strozzi fu anche obbligato a dar mallevadore per duemila fiorini.’

6There is no documentation available for this assumption, but it seems a viable explanation for the depletion of Matteo’s estate.

7Baxendale, ‘Exile in Practice,’ Renaissance Quarterly, Vol.44, p732, ‘Although they could use or rent the property, they were forbidden to sell it until they were widowed.’

8D Herlihy & C Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, London, 1985, pp299-301. Table 10-3 shows that in the Catasto of 1427, just ten years before Alessandra returned to Florence of almost 23,000 household heads, only 169 were women aged between 28 and 37.
estates. However, there is little public record of their achievements, although they were able to own and to buy and sell property and also to inherit property. In private diaries there are numerous references to women who owned land in Florence in the fifteenth century, which was not part of their dowry.9

The Strozzi parentado available in Florence for financial advice for Alessandra was limited and the political power of those remaining was restricted by the proscription placed on exiles and their relatives.10 Therefore, she had to take full responsibility for her household and in her straitened circumstances she was obliged to struggle constantly to make her meagre income cover the many demands on it. She sought and respected the advice of her husband’s cousins, Niccolò, Filippo and Iacopo di Lionardo, his closest surviving relatives, despite their working and living in Barcelona.11 In particular, she held Niccolò di Lionardo, who became her son Filippo’s mentor in Naples, in the highest

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10F W Kent, *Household and Lineage: The Family Life of the Capponi, Ginori and Rucellai*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977, pp5-6. Parentado, is a term defined in different ways by historians, but in its most general sense is used to refer to family connections by both blood and marriage.

11H Gregory, *A Florentine Family in Crisis*, unpublished thesis, London University, 1980. Genealogical table of the Strozzi mentioned in Alessandra Strozzi’s letters. This table shows clearly just how few close relatives there were.
esteem. Niccolò and his brothers conducted commercial enterprises in Barcelona, Naples and Bruges and Alessandra was able to place her sons in their business for training. She also received financial advice from Antonio Strozzi, who later held office in the Signoria.\(^\text{12}\) Later, her son-in-law, Marco Parenti, was of great assistance to her and much later, of course, her son Filippo took a more effective advisory part in her financial affairs.

Alessandra became responsible for the payment of her own taxes at the early age of twenty-nine, and she referred regularly to the heavy burden which this taxation imposed. Taxes imposed on Florentine citizens were frequent, onerous and often punitive.\(^\text{13}\) Prior to the introduction of the Catasto, in 1427, the method of raising communal funds had been by means of Prestanze.\(^\text{14}\) In return for the forced loans levied by the Commune, the citizens received shares in the public debt. Interest was then supposed to be paid to the citizens on these 'loans' but only occasionally were the loans repaid. The new tax law of 1427 was said

\(^{12}\)Gregory, Family in Crisis, see earlier reference to Genealogical Table, Antonio di Benedetto Strozzi, who rented Alessandra's matrimonial home and was one of her valued advisers, was a sixth cousin twice removed of her husband, Matteo di Simone.

\(^{13}\) F Baxendale, 'Exile in Practice:' Renaissance Quarterly, p751, claims that during the exile of the Alberti men, the women of the family made an active contribution to the maintenance of the family and it was the physical presence of these women in Florence which protected family interests. See also Goldthwaite, Private Wealth, footnote 42, p51. 'Her letters reveal a continual concern about money matters, especially tax payments.'

to be more equitable and each household head had to submit a detailed declaration or portata of all forms of household wealth. This included tutti beni, immobili e mobili, and deductions could be claimed for various fiscal obligations, and the number of bocche in the household, excluding paid servants. The tax was levied on the income of the household every time the government saw a need for more income. The Catasto system was said to be particularly hard on the wealthy, although it has also been claimed that, in fact, the wealthy were favoured by generous exemptions. The system was still clearly inequitable and Alessandra deplored the fact that in a time of no extraordinary expenses for the government, such as war, most of the taxes to be paid seemed to be going into the pockets of the rich.

Although Alessandra certainly had income-producing property and was by no means a pauper, she complained bitterly of her taxes and waged a constant battle over the payment of the imposts, each of which was met only after she had exhausted

15 Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, p11. This study based on the Florentine Catasto of 1427, has shown that 'Every Florentine citizen and subject who was liable for the payment of the forced loan in the city' was required to provide an inventory of real estate, animals, merchandise, credits and shares in the public debt.

16 Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, pp3-8 and pp14-27. The catasto represented the amount to be paid by each household 'every time the state imposed a loan or tax'. The rate was initially set, in Florence, at 0.5%.


18 Strozzi, Lettere, L40, p355. '...ch'è un miracolo e danari si pagano! Non ci sendo altre spese si soglino, tutti credo tornino nelle buone borse.' See also ibid., footnote, p355.
every possible delaying tactic. She was harassed in 1447 by no fewer than four officials trying to recover her debt of 240 florins to the Commune. At this time, she reached an agreement with them to pay nine florins monthly; she then awaited in trepidation the promulgation of the new taxes which were due, which she hoped would be applied to her at the special rate for widows and orphans. This was probably another of Alessandra’s attempts to postpone payment and manipulate the system as it is unlikely that she would have been classified as one of the miserabili. By mid-1450 Alessandra had made an agreement with the Commune requiring an additional ninety florins, and increasing her debt to 400 florins. Under the new Communal taxes published in the previous week, Alessandra would have to pay over 5 florins in gold, with an additional six florins to be paid monthly to the Commune. A few weeks before the death of Matteo, she wrote that he had paid three tax assessments for her, which were recorded in detail in her own workbook and she filed the receipts he sent her.

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19Ibid., Ll, pp6-7. ‘De’ fatti del Comune, t’avviso che ho debito fiorini dugento quaranta, e sono istata molestata da no’ meno di quattro Ufici, che hanno a riscuotere per Comune:’

20Ibid., Ll, p7. ‘Aspettasi che la gravezza nuova esca fuori per tutto ottobre; che se mi fanno il dovere, come dicono, di non porre albltro a vedova e pupilli...’ Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, p19, record that officials were authorised to declare all miserabili as exempt – this category included ‘the infirm, the aged, minor orphans, and, above all, widows.’

21Ibid., Lll, p126-7. In Note D to this letter, Cesare Guasti said that he believed that this tax was so severe that one citizen was forced into voluntary exile. Alessandra’s tax for the year was 192 florins, which was a large sum.
which were to go to the Monte later. Why Matteo, who was in Naples, would pay her taxes is difficult to ascertain, but it may have been a move to keep their capital in Florence. When her tax burden continued to be a problem, she indicated that she was worried that she would have to use the Florentine capital.

In 1459, Alessandra told Lorenzo that she would pay as much as she could and when she had no money, 'they' (the Commune) would have to be patient. She continued to procrastinate over tax payments although she paid 45 florins on five levies and 24 florins off the old taxes.

When Filippo credited her with 134 florins in April 1464, she kept 18 florins to pay two catasti. After paying these taxes and those of the following month, she would keep the remainder of the money for a further impost due in September. She exclaimed that she never did anything other than pay taxes. Just a few months later, in January 1465, Filippo paid another 24 florins into Zanobi di Dietisalvi's bank which Alessandra needed to pay taxes. It seems likely that Filippo continued to send tax assistance for Alessandra from Naples to retain the Florentine property intact. Certainly, failure to

\[\text{Ibid., L44, p388, Alessandra maintained her own accounts and kept a daybook. 'Acconcerò come m'ha detto Tommaso; e oltre a questo, ne farò ricordo al mio quadernuccio.' Guasti (Ed) in Note C to L10, p122, also refers to Alessandra's Libro.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., L15, p160, 'Engegnerommi di pagare mentre ch'io potrò; e quando non arò danari, aranno pazienza; e faremo el meglio si potrà.'}\]

\[\text{Ibid., L31, p293. 'che mai s'ha a fare altro che pagar catasti!'}\]

\[\text{Ibid., L41, p361. 'Avete fatti buoni al banco di Zanobi di Dietisalvi fiorini 24, che sta bene: arò bisogno fra pochi dì di pagare altri catasti; chiederò loro danari, e ne darò avviso;'}\]
pay taxes was a serious offence in Florence and was punishable by exile, excommunication, or in extreme cases, execution. When Alessandra had a further three and a half catasti to pay, she was hoping that the family reputation would not be harmed by her affairs.

In October 1465, less than one year before Filippo returned to Florence, Alessandra was still having tax problems. Her tax obligation had not yet been agreed at this time and she worried that matters were proceeding so slowly. She wrote to Filippo that Giovanni Bonsi, whom she had sent to check, had told her that there was to be no relief from her tax imposition. She finally decided to pay all her unpaid catasti towards the end of 1465 when it was feared that the new Gonfalonier of Justice, Niccolò Soderini, intended to increase the rate of taxation. In her anxiety to pay before the taxes were raised she was even prepared to withdraw 19 gold florins from the bank.

Alessandra's major source of income derived from the property which constituted her own dowry, and the farms from Matteo's estate, which had not been confiscated when he was banished. Filippo and his brothers submitted a taxation return in 1451, before the sentence of exile was extended to include them, stating that all their fixed assets in Florence had been just sufficient to repay their mother's dowry of 1600 florins in 1440, and it is unlikely that they had acquired any additional assets by 1451. In fact, that 1451 Catasto return

26 Ibid., L58, p506. '...che va a perdere.' Guasti added a footnote that this signifies that the money had to be paid directly on this occasion, and not into the communal Monte where it could increase.

27 Ibid., C Guasti (Ed), Proemio, pxxv, Portata al Catasto del Quartiere Santa Maria Novella, gonfalone Lion Rosso, 1451 (n.196, c.782). This was
of the three Strozzi brothers records that Alessandra had accepted all the unsold furniture, furnishings and real estate as her dowry and that with this she had supported her children because they had nothing else, except heavy tax debts to the Commune.\textsuperscript{28} The net income of the brothers in 1454 in Florence amounted to a little more than 165 florins, although the Catasto return for that year showed an additional 21 florins which seems to have been the difference between the rent received from Antonio for Alessandra's family home and the rent she paid for a house in S. Spirito Quarter.\textsuperscript{29} Alessandra lived in this small house in the Quarter of S. Spirito while Antonio di Benedetto Strozzi rented her family home in the Corso degli Strozzi until his death in 1454, which was one of her small sources of income. She then returned to the Corso degli Strozzi and lived there for the remainder of her life.

Richard Goldthwaite has suggested that Alessandra sent her dowry to Filippo while he was apprenticed to a family friend, Giorgio di Brandolino, in Palermo. Had she so capitalised her dowry in 1441, there would then have been no means of generating income to support herself and her family. The fact that her dowry was still being referred to in a catasto return ten years after

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in agreement with the portata submitted by Alessandra in the Quartiere di Santo Spirito, gonfalone Drago.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., Proemio pxxv. Guasti wrote of the disposition of the real estate and furniture and furnishings, 'nel Catasto del 1451, alla portata di Filippo degli Strozzi e fratelli'.

\textsuperscript{29}R Goldthwaite, \textit{The Building of Renaissance Florence}, Johns Hopkins University Press, London, 1980, p430. In 1447 the florin was worth 92 soldi di piccioli and the value had risen slightly by 1451 to 96 soldi, and 102 soldi by 1454.
supposedly being sent to Filippo in Palermo, militates against the possibility of its having been used to provide capital for the fourteen-year-old youth.\textsuperscript{30} Whatever funds she may have provided for Filippo in 1441, the proceeds of the sale of the house in Corso degli Stroazzi which constituted part of her dowry, were not included.

One of Alessandra’s first duties after her return to Florence had almost certainly been to make an investment in the Monte delle doti to provide dowries for her two daughters. Caterina and Lesandra each received dowries of 1000 florins, the smallest sum that she was able in good conscience to provide from the family estate. It was not usual to make an investment in the Monte delle doti before a daughter reached the age of five, because of the high mortality rate in young children.\textsuperscript{31} It is likely that Matteo had paid a deposit into the Monte delle doti on behalf of a daughter, Andreuola (born 1427) who died later in Pesaro. This dowry would have been forfeited with Andreuola’s death. Caterina was only two-years-old when the family went

\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Ibid.}, p54. No evidence for Goldthwaite’s unsupported assumption that Filippo received his mother’s dowry while in Palermo in 1441 has been found.

\textsuperscript{31}J Kirshner & A Molho, ‘The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Early Quattrocento Florence’, Journal of Modern History, 50 (September 1978), pp403-438. In 1433 the law regarding the Monte delle doti was amended so that 60 florins yielded 500 florins in fifteen years. Caterina’s dowry matured in May 1450, and as her family had been in exile fifteen years earlier, it would appear to have been invested after Alessandra’s return to Florence and Lesandra’s somewhat later. Kirshner & Molho have argued, possibly erroneously (pp415-6), citing Carte Strozziane, ser.5, 11, [which I have not sighted], that Matteo di Simone Strozzi opened an account in the Monte delle doti for his youngest daughter in March 1439. Matteo had been dead for three years in 1439.
into exile and the other daughter, Lesandra, was an infant at that time, so that it is unlikely that Matteo made any Monte arrangements on their behalf, before leaving Florence. He would not have been permitted to make any such transaction after his banishment.

In this, as in many other matters, Alessandra showed her understanding of the delicate balance between wealth, social position and honour in a family as she manipulated her small investments to support the family, provide capital for her sons and dowries for her daughters.32 The dowry of 1000 florins for her elder daughter, Caterina, on her marriage to Marco Parenti was paid under a complex arrangement whereby Marco was to receive the first 500 florins in cash and gifts at the time of marriage in November 1447.33 That Marco was prepared to wait until 1450 for the remaining 500 florins was unusual and very fortunate for Alessandra, for, as she wrote to Filippo, men wanted money when they married and were not normally prepared to wait for the dowry.34

It was to be a great relief to Alessandra that Caterina survived the birth of her first child, for had she died before the final payment from the Monte delle doti in May 1450, only the initial deposit


33In fact Caterina did not 'go to her husband' until January 1448, (s.c).

34Strozzi, Lettere, L1, p4. '...chi to' donna vuol danari; e non trovavo chi volesse aspettare d'averle la dota...’
could have been recovered from the Commune.\textsuperscript{35} When Caterina became pregnant, Alessandra took out insurance against the eventuality of her death during parturition for 12 florins, with a small fee for the broker.\textsuperscript{36} Although Marco Parenti did not see the need for this, Alessandra regarded the expenditure as worthwhile in the circumstances, as she would have had to pay him the full amount of the dowry without assistance from the Monte, had Caterina died in childbirth.\textsuperscript{37}

Alessandra was prepared, as her younger daughter Lesandra neared marriageable age, to pay 200 florins in addition to the 1000 florins in the Monte delle doti in Lesandra’s name, if someone suitable could be found. In fact, she only had to pay 70 additional florins for her when she was married to Giovanni di Donato Bonsi in 1451. Alessandra sought the most suitable husbands available for her daughters while she paid the minimum amount possible in dowries.

Throughout the long years of her sons' absence from Florence, Alessandra continued to act as their business agent for produce sent to Naples and for shipments sent in return from Naples to Florence, giving detailed accounts of weights and the cost of cartage. She could drive a hard bargain; as with a shipment of flax which she expected to re-sell to


\textsuperscript{36}Strozzi, \textit{Lettere}, L4, pp59-60 and ibid., L5, p69. This was a transaction undertaken on her behalf by Antonio Strozzi.

\textsuperscript{37}J Kirshner & A Molho, 'The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Early Quattrocento Florence', \textit{Journal of Modern History}, 50, (Sept 1978), p406 state that the deposit reverted to the commune if the girl died before expiration of the term.
double her profit.\textsuperscript{38} She also acted as agent in the sale of the superior flax which her half-sister, Ginevra, wanted to buy.\textsuperscript{39} Four months later Alessandra reported the necessity for drying a shipment of flax in Pisa before selling, complaining of the cost to her of such treatment which clearly reduced the weight of the flax, and thus her return. She recorded in detail the cost of carrying the produce and the name of the carrier, particularly in the years before her sons became independent and while her younger daughter remained at home needing a dowry, when even the cost of cartage was important.\textsuperscript{40} Francesco di Batista, carried fennel and cheeses to Filippo in Naples, and Alessandra instructed Filippo that it was not necessary to pay him for this, while Favilla, a regular carrier, was owed 14 lire for produce which he carried from Naples in April 1451 with a load of flax. Alessandra complained that the charge for this shipment, part of which was for her daughter Caterina, and part for Antonio Strozzi, was the dearest she had paid that year and she intended to withhold payment.\textsuperscript{41} The carrier begged her for

\textsuperscript{38}Strozzi, \textit{Lettere}, L5, p71, 'e se mi venissi la libbra come quello mi mandasti, si raddoppierebbe e danari,' \\

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., L5, p72. The two hundred pounds of flax cost approximately eight florins. \\

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., L8, p105, 'ora, per amor della Lesandra che non è allogata, non mi vo'partire di qui:' \\

\textsuperscript{41}Strozzi, \textit{Lettere}, L10, pp116-7. The one and a half ducats paid by Filippo were worth six lire and eighteen soldi according to Favilla, leaving seven lire and two soldi of the total 14 lire for Alessandra to pay. In 1451 a florin was valued at 92 soldi when a skilled labourer earned an average daily wage of 18.9 soldi, an unskilled worker 9.6 soldi. Paid in wheat, the wage was the equivalent of 0.5 staio (approximately 0.7 bushel, or 42lbs/18kg in modern terms), so the worker received
payment and she finally posted a further three lire to Favilla’s account in her books after Marco Parenti, her son-in-law, paid his share of the carrier’s charge.

She paid Giovanni Bonsi for spectacles which had been sent to Filippo through Niccolò Strozzi in Rome, and this was duly recorded. Even small sums such as seven lire paid in March 1464 for the cartage of a beast to Rome, and for which Niccolo reimbursed her, were recorded by Alessandra, the meticulous bookkeeper. She was displeased when Filippo sent flax to Caterina as a gift, as she believed that Marco could well afford to pay for it, despite the fact that at that time in 1464, Filippo could equally well afford the gift.

Alessandra’s finances were at a very low ebb early in 1453 and Lorenzo continued to cause her problems and drain the family coffers. She was forced to tell him that it was not the appropriate time to spend money on the birds he had requested; there were more important needs and his expenses and approximately 5kg wheat daily, or its equivalent. Wheat, the grain with the highest food value, was worth about 2.3 soldi/lb. See Goldthwaite, The Building of Renaissance Florence, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1989, Appendix 3, pp436-9). By these standards, Favilla was receiving a very low payment for his work.

42 Ibid., L28, p277, ‘Questo dì so comperorno gli occhiali, e ti si mandano sotto lettere di Niccolò Strozzi a Roma pel fante:’

43 Ibid., L28, p272, ‘che lire 7 pagò qua per vettura d’una bestia insino a Roma, come da lui sentirai:’

44 Ibid., L29, p280. ‘Questo voglio detto, perché mi par troppo lino a donare a Marco, che ha el modo a pagare;’
taxes were already excessive.\textsuperscript{45} In order to avoid selling the farm at Pazzolatico she needed Lorenzo’s power of attorney as soon as possible to save it and to prevent attracting further debt to the Commune. Lorenzo already owed 200 florins in back-taxes and the Commune levied an additional 70 florins.\textsuperscript{46} He was to have a share of the proceeds from the farm she had sold at Campi, despite the considerable expense she had with his debts and misbehaviour and the further expense following his illness.\textsuperscript{47}

After the death of Iacopo in Bruges in 1461, Lorenzo had a continuing problem with Lodovico di Francesco di Benedetto Strozzi and his brother Battista over Iacopo’s estate.\textsuperscript{48} These distant cousins were extremely dissatisfied with Lorenzo’s administration of Iacopo’s accounts after his death and had threatened Lorenzo.\textsuperscript{49} They claimed that he (Lorenzo) had drawn money which Filippo had sent to Iacopo and a further sum which they understood he had taken for Alessandra who believed that it was to

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Ibid.}, L16, p166, ‘Vorreii m’avvisassi quanti furono e danari ti dissi mi serbassi per espese nella malattia di Lorenzo, quanti furono, e quanti i’n’ebbi;’

\textsuperscript{46}\textit{Ibid.}, L11, p129, ‘Di poi avete debito qualche fiorini 70.’

\textsuperscript{47}\textit{Ibid.}, L13, p144, ‘Presi partito di vendere el podere da Campi,’

\textsuperscript{48}\textit{Ibid.}, L34, p306. See again H. Gregory, \textit{A Florentine Family in Crisis}, pp209-10, for genealogical table of Strozzi family members mentioned in Alessandra’s letters. Lodovico and Battista, sixth cousins at least three times removed of Lorenzo’s father, Matteo di Simone, were mentioned relatively frequently.

\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Ibid.}, L30, p286, and Note A, p290, Guasti (Ed) wrote that ‘the good and wise Alessandra foresaw’ that these two men would cause Lorenzo much annoyance for a long period, as indeed they did.

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cover her expenses on behalf of Isabella di Iacopo.\textsuperscript{50} It was obvious to Alessandra that in this matter the court would find against Lorenzo and he would have to pay a penalty which she believed unfair as he was unable to defend himself in person.\textsuperscript{51} Alessandra was never able to afford the purchase of additional property although in 1448 she very much wanted to buy the small house adjoining her family home, with a view to the future development of the site for her sons.\textsuperscript{52}

After Alessandra had recovered sufficiently from her grief at Matteo's death in 1459, she began to apply her attention once again to business affairs. She sold the farm at Antella, which she had inherited from her brother Zanobi, to pay Lorenzo's debts. She received 800 florins for the Antella property, and it is likely that Alessandra well understood that this property would eventually be reclaimed by the Macinghi, but while it was within her grasp, she sold it to raise money which she then needed. She retained 200 florins for

\textsuperscript{50}Strozzi, Lettere, L34, p306. Isabella was the natural daughter of Iacopo di Lionardo, first cousin of Alessandra's husband, Matteo di Simone and Lorenzo di Matteo's mentor in Bruges. Alessandra arranged a marriage for her in Florence.

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., L34, p308, 'farà più chiaro l'Ufficio ha dare la sentenza contro a Lorenzo:'

\textsuperscript{52}Ibid., L2, pp37-8, also ibid., Note I, p43. This house had been part of Messer Palla di Nofri Strozzi's property, confiscated when he was sent into exile by the Medici regime in 1434. The families of the Strozzi lineage lived in houses on the Corso degli Strozzi, known then as the Piazza delle Cipolle, in the parish of Santa Maria Ughi of the Lion Rosso gonfalone in the Quarter of Santa Maria Novella. This property was bought by Filippo in 1477 and became part of the site of the magnificent palace built by Filippo di Matteo Strozzi after his return to Florence, which Alessandra did not live to see.
herself, and her sons were to share the remainder of the proceeds.\textsuperscript{53} The cost of the ratification of the contract for the sale of the property was to be divided between herself, Filippo and Lorenzo.\textsuperscript{54} She proposed to sell the wall hangings that Lorenzo had sent from Bruges if she could get a good price to defray her share of these costs, otherwise she would have to get it from Filippo.\textsuperscript{55} In the end, Alessandra had to pay a penalty of 500 florins for having sold Zanobi Macinghi's farm to messer Otto Niccolini.\textsuperscript{56} She paid 100 florins to Francesco Macinghi (her cousin), leaving 400 florins to be paid in two instalments, of which she had already paid 75 florins, the remainder to be paid later.\textsuperscript{57}

Alessandra owned several other small farms and vineyards, which she sold from time to time to provide capital for her sons and she distributed the capital realised from the sale of these properties, including the farm at Campi.\textsuperscript{58} When she sent 134 florins to Niccolò Strozzi in Rome from the proceeds of land sale, Niccolò acknowledged receipt, and added that he thought that she needed the money herself. She then disposed of two remaining vineyards at Quaracchi and again forwarded the

\textsuperscript{53}Ibid., L12, pp136, 'I'gli fo ritenere fiorini 200 per mia bisogni;'

\textsuperscript{54}See chapter on Litigation for this lawsuit with the Macinghi.

\textsuperscript{55}Ibid., L22, p231, 'S'i'trovassi da vendergli bene, gli venderei tramendua.'

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., L13, p144. Messer Otto Niccolini had purchased Zanobi Macinghi's farm at Antella from Alessandra.

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., L21, p224, 'Che, come ti scrissi, avemo una condannaggione di fiorini cinquecento;'

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., L13, p144, 'Presi partito di vendere el podere da Campi,'
proceeds to Niccolò.\textsuperscript{59} While in the process of selling one piece of vineyard at Quaracchi, Alessandra became concerned that the potential buyer might be put off by unseasonal snow affecting the crop.\textsuperscript{60} At the same time there was a problem with a possible error in the measurement of the vineyard, which she believed it to be seven \textit{staiora} in size, valued at ten florins per \textit{staioro}, and she worried when rain delayed having it re-measured.\textsuperscript{61}

It was essential that Alessandra always administer her precarious financial affairs with meticulous attention to detail and without sentimental weakness. She did not hesitate to put the elderly sharecroppers off her farm when they became too ill to continue working. The contractual arrangement which existed between the sharefarmer and the owner of a \textit{mezzadria} was not a personal one.\textsuperscript{62} For Alessandra there was no sentiment in business and her action in terminating the contract

\textsuperscript{59}\textit{Ibid.}, L28, p274, 'e de'danari rimessi a Roma a Niccolò Strozzi,' probably remitted to Niccolò's bank, en route to her son, Filippo.

\textsuperscript{60}\textit{Ibid.}, L32, p302. 'che presso a qui è venuto di molta neve; sicche ho paura che'l commeratore non sia isbigottito, avendo ricevuto danno le vigne.'

\textsuperscript{61}\textit{Ibid.}, L34, p309. 'Non s'è fatta ancora la carta della vigna, che s'è preso errore nella misura: hassi a rimisurare: \textit{staioro} was a measure of land area which could be sown with one bushel (\textit{staio}) of corn.

\textsuperscript{62}Herlihy & Klapisch Zuber, \textit{Tuscans and their Families}, p120. 'The \textit{mezzadria}, hardly an idyllic contract in human terms, sustained in Central Tuscany a reasonably well-managed agriculture.' and see also I Origo, \textit{The Merchant of Prato}, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1958, p248, 'By this profit-sharing system,...,the land-owner supplied a house, tools, seed, and cattle, and the peasant the labour - both sharing the profits in equal parts.'
was simply that of a business woman.  

When she found it necessary to remit a further 500 florins to Niccolò Strozzi, she persuaded Giovanni Borromei to take it to Rome personally, to avoid paying charges to the Capponi bank.  

Alessandra was never able to regard even small sums as insignificant and she was always anxious that Filippo should understand that she had no money which was undisclosed. Filippo, now thirty-six years old, was undoubtedly financially independent at this time, and he had just received a concession for the operation of a bank from the King of Naples.

The death of Cosimo de' Medici in August 1464 caused a climate of political uncertainty in Florence which had a generally deleterious effect on financial affairs in the city.  

Alessandra watched the havoc created in the financial world as many bankruptcies followed and she well knew that such financial failures had wide ramifications which brought dishonour to an entire lineage.

Among the failures at this time was Giovanfrancesco di messer Palla Strozzi, and

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63 Strozzi, Lettere, L48, p438, 'ancora vive Piero e Mona Cilia, tramenda infermi...e que'due vecchi, se non muoiono, hanno andare accattare. Iddio provegga.' Presumably by their death.

64 Ibid., L39, pp345, 'rimise a Roma a Niccolò, per mano di Giovanni Borromei, fiorini cinquecento;'

65 Goldthwaite, Private Wealth, footnote p55 citing Carte Strozziane-v, 1087, No 12.

66 Strozzi, Lettere, L37, p333. 'Qua ci è di grande traverse, tra falliti che ci sono e degli altri che crocchiano.'

67 Ibid., L38, p336. Giovanfrancesco di messer Palla Strozzi was a fourth cousin of Alessandra's husband. See Gregory, Florentine Family, Table 1, pp209-210.
Lodovico Strozzi, to whom Filippo offered assistance, was another victim. Alessandra understood Lodovico to be paying the full twenty soldi in the lira on a debt of 16,000 florins, and that his own foolish actions were responsible for his predicament. She commented ironically that 'poor' Lodovico would remain rich, although it remained to be seen what other debts he had. Lorenzo Larioni was also bankrupted at this time, but since he owed 160,000 florins of which he would pay not more than a few soldi per lira, those to whom he owed money were the greatest losers. Alessandra clearly recognised that in such financial disasters, the lineage in general suffered greater dishonour than the individual, and while wealthy citizens such as Giovanfrancesco might suffer a degree of shame when bankrupt, their personal wealth was not seriously affected. Satisfactory marriages contracts could be made for the children of rich bankrupts, although perhaps not with top Florentine families, as eventually was arranged for Giovanfrancesco's niece, Marietta di Lorenzo di messer Palla. Giovanfrancesco's bankruptcy had

68 This Lodovico is probably Ludovico di Francesco Strozzi, a sixth cousin three times removed of Alessandra's husband, and the nephew of Antonio di Benedetto who occupied Alessandra's house until his death in 1454, and advised her on many matters. Lodovico with his brother Battista, sought and won restitution from Alessandra and Lorenzo for a claim on the estate of Iacopo di Lionardo - see this chapter above (Letter 34). Table of references to Strozzi Genealogy in Gregory, Florentine Family, Tables 1 & 2, pp209-211.

69 Ibid., L41, p358. See also ibid., Note A, p363, 'Sento renderà pochi soldi per lira: el danno e di chi perde di suo.'

70 Ibid., L31, Note B, p298. Marietta was eventually married to one of the Calcagnini family of Ferrara where her grandfather lived throughout his long exile.
brought grave dishonour to the Strozzi parentado, and Filippo argued against marriage with Marietta for Lorenzo, because their family could not afford such a stigma.\(^\text{71}\)

Alessandra accepted that the falling interest rate from the Commune was sufficient problem without the disgrace brought on the family by Giovanfrancesco’s bankruptcy.\(^\text{72}\) Interest rates in the government debt, the Monte, fell as a result of the uncertainty caused by the fiscal failures after Cosimo’s death, undoubtedly causing hardship for those dependent for income from the receipt of interest. Within a few months a further fall in the Monte rate was causing Alessandra concern because Lesandra’s dowry was invested in the Commune debt. Consequently, she was looking carefully at the possibility of re-investing it in something ‘guaranteed and secure’.\(^\text{73}\) It had been intended originally to sell only part of it, but the interest rate had fallen to 27.5%, and Giovanni Bonsi (Lesandra’s husband) had decided that he did not want to take less than 30%.\(^\text{74}\) Two weeks later, there was a further fall in the Monte rate causing continued concern for Lesandra’s dowry, although Alessandra did not give the actual rate at this time.

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\(^{71}\) *Ibid.*, L39, p342 see footnote (Guasti), ‘...che il fallimento di questo Strozzi rovinava molti, anche fra i consorti; e poi faceva danno, se non altro, alla reputazione.’

\(^{72}\) *Ibid.*, L47, p421. ‘Tra Giovanfrancesco e questi, se gli perdessi, el monte iscemerebbe assai:...’

\(^{73}\) *Ibid.*, L40, p353, ‘si rinvesto en cosa soda e sicura per lei.’

\(^{74}\) *Ibid.*, L40, pp353-4. ‘...pero’ che ’l Monte è scemato, che è a 27 e mezzo; e Giovanni mi dice no ne vuole pigliare partito se non è a 30...’
Alessandra was not pleased when a matter arose concerning a wool manufactory in which her husband, Matteo di Simone, had been a partner. Francesco Strozzi reported to Alessandra that he had heard from a friend (whom he who did not wish to name), that the heirs of Lionardo, Piero and Matteo, who had been the partners in a bottega were owed about seventy florins by Tinoro Guasconi. However, Niccolò Strozzi told her that he did not believe that there was any way to recover this money from Guasconi. Many years later, another outstanding debt from the past was found, this time owed by her husband, Matteo. The pork butcher from Borgo Sa’ Lorenzo, to whom it was owed, estimated the debt at nine florins. Excommunication could result from failure to pay such a debt in addition to serious family shame, so Alessandra consulted the priest at Santa Maria degli Ughi, her parish church. She also sought Filippo’s advice since the excommunication could be extended to him, as his father’s heir. The contract from the notary showed that Matteo di Simone had indeed owed the nine florins to a horse-dealer, Agnolo de Vergereto, and Alessandra found that there was, in fact, an entry in Matteo’s account book for the debt. She made an agreement with the butcher to pay him five of the nine florins owed and entered this in her late husband’s account book, which seems to have brought the matter to an honourable conclusion.

Alessandra was responsible for several farms

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Ibid., L14, pp153-4.

Ibid., L14, p154, see footnote 1, ‘Niccolò credeva che non vi fosse ragione o modo di riscuotere questi fiorini dal Guasconi.’

Ibid., L39, p347, ‘sì che, quando cadessimo in questo, i’non credere’mai capitar bene di nulla ch’i’avessi a fare.’
and the tenants or sharefarmers and the crops. In 1450 she was deeply worried about the loss of the harvest and the money she would be unable to recover from the sharefarmers, as a result of deaths from plague.\textsuperscript{78} Fifteen years later, when she had to employ a new tenant for the farm at Pazzolatico which had fallen into disrepair during the tenancy of the elderly couple, Piero and Mona Cilia, she still hoped that the cost of manure would not have to be drawn from the bank.\textsuperscript{79} She reluctantly withdrew several florins from the bank to pay Marco Parenti for grain and wine when poor crops with a poor grain harvest and insufficient wine, while cheeses were not available and the fennel was not sweet. Her earlier prognostications of poor harvests had proved correct and her grape crop provided only eighteen barrels of wine and she reported that she was only able to get a small return on this. The poor wheat crop resulted in a shortage of grain and the price of bread rose; consequently the wine brought lower prices.\textsuperscript{80} By this time, in 1465, the necessity for Alessandra to guard her funds had diminished somewhat with Filippo’s increasing wealth.

Filippo held Alessandra’s opinion in high esteem and he requested her advice on Giovanni Bonsi’s suitability for the task of managing a proposed wool manufactory. At the beginning of 1466 he had decided to open a wool manufactory together

\textsuperscript{78}Ibid., L6, pp82-3, ‘E cinqu’anni affittai il mio podere a un buono lavoratore e ricco, ed erano tra uomini e donne e fanciugli diciassette, che n’è morte dodici:’

\textsuperscript{79}Ibid., L61, p525, ‘S’i’potrò fare sanza torre danari dal banco per questo, i’lo farò:’

\textsuperscript{80}Ibid., L58, p507. ‘E se non fussi la carestia del pane, el vino varrebbe un fiorino largo el barile; ma vale 3 lire e soldi.’
with Carlo and Giovanni di ser Francesco Strozzi and he wanted to have Giovanni Bonsi as its manager. She reported that she believed Giovanni to be faithful and that he meant well and was quite capable of managing the business. However, she felt that he should be required to keep careful accounts and she did not think that he should be given the responsibility for the money as he was not really dependable in money matters. In fact, Alessandra was in some doubt as to whether the 200 florin debt, to which Bonsi admitted, was the full extent of his indebtedness. She was insistent that Filippo should set the terms firmly and ensure that Giovanni really understand the importance of what was being done for him and the damage that could be done if he were to let them down as the last thing her family needed was another disgrace.

Giovanni was reticent about his affairs although Alessandra knew that he had borrowed eighty florins from Marco Parenti to pay for a dowry for his daughter as well as another forty florins he owed to Filippo. Giovanni and Lesandra had a family of eight and owing to bad weather and poor harvests, their financial situation forced them to re-make and repair clothes. He had been obliged to purchase on credit the pink cloth for his Scrutiny mantle.

Alessandra also reported that Giovanni was trying to borrow money from the Commune to buy back his possessions and he owned some trees, the timber from which would be worth several hundred florins when mature. The Monte had paid 21% in interest on four hundred florins and the interest was now 30%. Alessandra and Marco Parenti were not

81 Ibid., L66, pp557-561.
82 Ibid., L66, pp557-562.
83 Ibid., L68, p570.
comfortable with the suggestion that Giovanni could withdraw the money he needed and then buy back into the Monte when the price dropped, as Marco was sure that this was illegal. 84 Alessandra conducted her affairs within the accepted legal bounds as she was always aware of the harm which could be done to her family by any dealings outside the law.

In 1470, several years after his successful reinstatement in Florence, Filippo returned at intervals to Naples where his bank remained. Alessandra at sixty-four reverted to her early habit of providing him with the details of costs and prices while he was away. For instance, eighteen staia of barley bought at 9 soldi, twelve hundred sheaves of barley hay, which she claimed was dear at 10 soldi per hundred sheaves, and the price of the grain itself was even dearer at 20 soldi per staio, while the price of wine had increased owing to the cold winter and it would be necessary to buy several barrels for the family. 85

To find suitable Florentine wives for her sons required Alessandra’s extensive knowledge of the financial position of the father of any potential wife and she described in detail in her letters the problems associated with dowries. The dowry could only be withdrawn from the Monte if a petition to the Commune to do so were successful, so she could not expect any useful capital from that source. 86

Household heads, whether male or female, became

84Ibid., L68, p574, ‘e disselo co Marco; e ne lo isconfortò, chè non era lecito contratto.’

85Ibid., L72, p604, ‘Della biada, cioè della spelda, n’ho comperata da diciotto staia soldi 9 lo staio, e mille dugento covoni di paglia d’orzo:’

86Ibid., L52, p465, ‘per rispetto che chi è fuori del contado e distretto di Firenze, togliendo donna di Firenze, non può aver la dota dal Monte, se non si vince pe’ Consigli;’
increasingly impoverished with advancing years, as Alessandra herself undoubtedly did. 87 This was the normal pattern in Florentine households as a detailed study carried out on the Tuscan family showed, wealth being distributed to facilitate the independence of children. 88 Alessandra probably ensured the distribution of her wealth at an earlier age than most and in the distribution of her few paltry garments after her death, there was no reference to any property. 89 She became just one of many Florentine widows who lived alone, at the age of only 45, after the marriage of Lesandra, her younger daughter, in 1451. However, this daughter with her husband, Giovanni Bonsi and their family, returned to live in her house on more than one occasion. 90 This served two purposes as Alessandra received exemptions from tax to the Commune for the extra bocche and Lesandra and her husband were constantly in debt. 91

It is a sad commentary on the lack of appreciation accorded by her family to Alessandra's

87 Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, p305, claim that widows, in particular, became 'increasingly impoverished' as they aged. Men began at the age of about 50-55 to transmit their wealth to their children, setting up sons in business and dowries for daughters.

88 Ibid., p309. Alessandra, as an example of widows, had already distributed most of her 'wealth' before she was forty-five.

89 Strozzi, Lettere, L72, Note B, pp610-11.

90 Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans, p308, footnote 30. In a study of over 7000 female heads of household, more than half of whom were over 60, only 44 of them in their 20s. Nearly 53,000 households had a male as head. See also chapter on Affective Bonds.

91 Ibid., p11. Bocche, (singular: bocca = mouth), a term used to signify the inhabitants of a household.
selfless devotion that it was not until the end of 1465 that she felt able to afford to spend five florins to have prayers said on All Souls’ Day. She asked Filippo for permission to draw fourteen florins from the bank to pay for two catasti. Her own property now much diminished and thus her taxes, as this small sum for payment of taxes demonstrates. She also requested five florins for the saying of the Offices for the Dead and another four florins for a length of damask as a gift for her doctor.\footnote{Ibid., L45, p397. 'I’ho fatto levare a Tommaso braccia 4 di domaschino bigio per donare al maestro Lodovico,'} Fourteen florins was indeed a paltry sum for the wealthy banker.

Alessandra had taxes levied on her property and income throughout her thirty years as the head of the household in Florence, and she also had to find the money to pay the levies on her sons’ property and her husband’s debts remained her continuing responsibility. Under the burdensome taxation laws implemented in a city in which taxes, government, finance and litigation were inextricably linked, she managed the family estate efficiently and her control of her income was noteworthy. Her greatest financial problem was in finding the means to pay the heavy burden of taxation which now fell on her. Her comprehension of the financial system in Florence is demonstrated as she succeeded in remaining just one step ahead of disaster in the payment of her taxes and avoidance of debt, and the way in which she was able to invest her income while postponing the payment of the imposts. She made use of any stratagem she could to retain control of her property and to ensure the preservation of her small income, her objective always to retain her capital intact for her sons. She managed this capital very
carefully as she dealt with the demands of tenants, bought cattle, sold produce and over the years sold most of the property to provide for her sons, Filippo and Lorenzo. In fact, Alessandra’s appreciation of the value of money made a conspicuous contribution to the success of the family.

Alessandra has recorded in her letters just how she concentrated throughout the period of her sons’ absence from their native city on promoting their financial position, with a relatively detailed account of her expenditure and her activities. She invested in the Monte delle doti just enough to provide the lowest possible dowries for her two daughters commensurate with her position in the Florentine patriciate. It must be added that many years later she was sufficiently pragmatic to be prepared to accept relatively small dowries on behalf of her sons in a compromise arrangement to attract suitable Florentine wives.

It is possible to understand something of how the everyday commercial life of Florence functioned from Alessandra’s methods. She kept a close watch on the changes in interest rates in order to invest her income favourably at the highest rate. She withheld the payment of tax imposts until the last moment in order to take advantage of these rates, and she stalled payment of taxes by appealing for exemptions. When she sold her brother’s farm in 1451, she almost certainly knew that the farm should belong to her half-brother, yet she used the proceeds to pay back taxes, and only had to repay them much later when she could better afford to do so. She sold property in small lots, making sure of a good price, and invested the proceeds until she could no longer postpone the payment of taxes or debts.
Alessandra has not received full credit for the years in which she managed the family estate despite her accurate accounting and meticulous detail so essential to good management. Filippo Strozzi has always been perceived as having succeeded his father with the intervening years of Alessandra's management completely overlooked. Since Florentine accounting methods did not include the periodical Trial Balance, this precludes determination of the exact state of Alessandra's financial affairs. Thus no complete record is available of the basis on which the sons of Matteo di Simone Strozzi were eventually able to found a large family fortune, but there can be no doubt that Alessandra made a very considerable contribution to their ultimate success.

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93 Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth*, p5. "... Florentines kept accounts even of household expenses as a matter of habit - EVEN WOMEN [my emphasis] could keep a respectable set of books." Goldthwaite added a footnote that 'Filippo Strozzi's mother kept her own accounts.' See Strozzi, *Lettere*, L10, p117 'Ho posto a suo conto lire 3, soldi 2; che tanti gli ho ritenuti' and *ibid.*, L14, p152, 'Lucco se n'ebbe, come per altra ti dissi, fiorini 12 larghi e soldi 4; hattene fatto creditore al Libro mio,"

94 *Ibid.*, p19, 'one can see an impressive difference in going from the books of Simone and Matteo Strozzi to Filippo;' failing to mention the thirty years of Alessandra's stewardship.


96 *Ibid.*, pp59-60. Table 4 shows that he was a wealthy man on his return to Florence from exile with an estate worth over 31,000 florins. It has been postulated in this study that Filippo may have received capital from the King of Naples or, unlikely as it may seem, from the Medici themselves in some mutually advantageous deal.
CHAPTER FOUR

AFFECTIVE BONDS

The letters of Alessandra Strozzi provide an excellent source for examination of her relationship with her sons which was undoubtedly the focus of her life. Useful material for the exploration of other affective bonds in fifteenth century Florence can also be deduced from the letters. Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of the mother-son bonds, it is worthwhile to analyse the letters for what little they can tell us about her relationships with her own natal family, her husband and her daughters, and then with the Strozzi family.

It is unfortunate that nothing is known about Alessandra’s childhood other than that she lost her mother at an early age. Her father then remarried and died when she was fourteen. Alessandra Macinghi was sixteen when she left home to marry the twenty-five year old Matteo di Simone, a scion of the largest lineage in Florence, the age difference between them was rather less than the twelve years that was the average in patrician families. The disparity in their educational standards would have been even wider since Matteo moved in intellectual humanist circles. Her marriage must have been seen by her family as a very prestigious and useful match. Nothing is known of the marriage except that

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1D Herlihy and C Klapisch Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, New Haven, 1985, Table 7.1, p210, showing the average age difference was 13.63 years. See also p210, citing Giovanni Morelli, Ricordi, (Ed) V Branca, Florence, 1969, p210, 'Take her as a child, if you wish to be happy...'

2See chapter on Letters and Alessandra’s Education.
Alessandra bore nine of her children in the fourteen years before the death of her husband, during which period Matteo was often absent from Florence on official business for the Commune, and her tenth child, Matteo di Matteo, was born after the death of his father in Pesaro.³

Matteo is rarely mentioned in Alessandra’s letters, but he had been dead for over ten years when the first of the letters was written in 1447. The greatest detail emerges in reference to a longstanding debt which was brought to Alessandra’s notice.⁴

When she returned to Florence as the widow of an exile with her young family, not only was she bereft of her husband and her parents to support her, but she had few immediate relatives. Her brother Zanobi and her much younger half-siblings, Antonio, Caterina and Ginevra and their mother were her only close relatives, and the only other Macinghi households in Florence were those of her father’s two brothers and their sons.

Alessandra’s letters make it clear that she continued to maintain her ties with her Macinghi family, although the humanist, Leon Battista Alberti, a lifelong bachelor, wrote that on marriage a woman was absorbed into the family of her husband.⁵ It is certainly true that a woman was

³C Guasti, ‘Proemio’, Lettere, pxx. See also L Fabbri, Alleanza Matrimoniale e Patriziatto nella Firenze del ’400, Olschki, Firenze, 1991, Genealogical Table between pp 29 and 30. See also chapter on Life Cycle.

⁴See chapter on Finances.

released from her father's jurisdiction on marriage and she was excluded from any further access to his property. 6 Alberti believed that the young wife should be isolated from her own family until she had recovered from 'her first pangs of longing for her mother and family' had faded and she should remain 'locked up at (her marital) home' to look after her husband's home. 7

Alessandra remained in close contact with her brother Zanobi di Filippo throughout his life. He was a man of apparently weak character who, when requested by Alessandra to chastise her 'recalcitrant slave' was unable to do so. 8 Her brother was a guest in her home on occasions and the visits were reciprocated. She spent some time at Zanobi's farm at Antella, recuperating after an illness, and she continued to see him at intervals until he died at the beginning of 1452. 9 It has been suggested that after her return to Florence she provided support for Zanobi who had been heavily taxed and was in debt as a result. 10 It is difficult to understand how the newly-widowed Alessandra could have been in a position to offer him financial assistance, although the mutually beneficial wills made by brother and sister were no doubt designed to compensate Alessandra for her


7 Ibid., p208.

8 Strozzi, Lettere, L8, p105, 'Non è uomo che la gastigassi,'

9 Ibid., L8, pp104-5 and L11, Note C, p131.


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In fact, Zanobi’s will led to protracted legal action against Alessandra by her half-siblings, and considerable friction in the family resulted. Despite this dissension, she was never completely isolated from her Macinghi relatives, even if the experience was not always one of mutual affection. She maintained fairly constant contact with her relatives and the letters contain many references to Macinghi family members. Her relationship with Caterina and Ginevra, her two half-sisters, seems to have been quite close throughout her life, and Alessandra provided sympathetic and affectionate support when Caterina’s son died of the plague. On the other hand, her relationship with her brother-in-law, Niccolò Soderini, (Ginevra’s husband) was often less than optimal although he undoubtedly proved to be a very useful conduit to the government of the Commune.

Alessandra’s continued close relationship with her daughters and sons-in-law indicates close ties with her natal family, and her interest in her daughters, Caterina and Lesandra, continued after their respective marriages. Martines has argued that her relationship with her daughters was not close and that she married them as low as possible.

11Ibid., pp62-3.

12See table of references to Macinghi at end of this chapter. Alessandra mentioned her Macinghi family members on over forty occasions. There were also more than twenty references to Niccolò Soderini, her brother-in-law. In addition she referred several times to the Macinghi family property which became the subject of litigation. That she made over sixty references to the Macinghi is not insignificant and almost half as many as the one hundred and fifty references to the much larger Strozzi family - see H. Gregory, A Florentine Family in Crisis, London, 1980, pp209-10 for table of references to the Strozzi.
on the social scale to preserve the family estate in favour of her sons. Alessandra certainly adopted a pragmatic approach to the marriage of her daughters when it was necessary that she should not waste the Strozzi patrimony in dowries to enrich other lineages. She made decisions which were obviously entirely appropriate at the time, and her pragmatism did not mean that she was without interest in her daughters and her relationship with them remained fond and mutually supportive.

She was especially fortunate in the marriage arranged for her elder daughter, Caterina, with Marco Parenti, who was young and well-to-do, and her relationship with him as adviser and confidant, is well-documented in her letters. She initially found it difficult to accept Marco as a full member of the family but despite his somewhat lower status, he later assumed an important role linking herself and Filippo with the cittadini principali of Florence and the ruling faction of the Medici. Alessandra met him frequently to discuss family matters as she came to depend upon him, and it seems unlikely that her daughter Caterina and her Parenti grandchildren were omitted from the many conversations between them.

In 1451, Giovanni Bonsi had seemed to be an eligible husband for her second daughter, Lesandra, although his parentado included six brothers. His family was patrician and at least one of his brothers, Francesco di Donato Bonsi, held office in the Signoria under the Medici government in 1444.

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Unfortunately, Giovanni failed to live up to expectations and caused many worried moments for Alessandra.

It is claimed by Martines that Alessandra '...would not have dreamed of establishing herself with her married daughters...'. Yet Lesandra and her husband, Giovanni Bonsi were indeed 'established' with Alessandra on more than one occasion, and when they moved in with her in July 1459, they even brought their household goods with them. Giovanni Bonsi, although somewhat older than Marco Parenti and of more patrician family, was clearly a less dependable husband. He was often a far from satisfactory son-in-law, although Alessandra included him in consultations with Marco, when his patrician parentado no doubt proved useful. Giovanni occupied her troubled thoughts on many occasions and she made every possible attempt to help her sons to provide him with a livelihood with which he could support his family.

Alessandra’s daughters and their families appear to have had a good continuing relationship with each other and with their brothers. They visited each other in their villas in the country. Before Matteo, her youngest son, left Florence to join Filippo in Naples he spent some time with Caterina and Marco in the Mugello during an outbreak of plague. Lorenzo, her second son, also visited Caterina and Marco at their villa when he was


16 Strozzi, Lettere, L15, p161, and ibid., L45, p397.

17 Ibid., L66, pp558-561.

recuperating in Florence after illness.¹⁹ Her daughters were never far from Alessandra’s mind and regular allusions to both daughters continued throughout the letters.²⁰ It was her daughters and sons-in-law who gently broke the news of the death of her son, Matteo, to Alessandra. Her family all escorted her tenderly to Giovanni Bonsi’s villa where her daughters remained with her and cared for her in her grief, and their own.²¹

When Alessandra returned to Florence to begin her campaign to have the honour and fortune of the family restored, she sought the support of the Strozzi parentado. It was not merely female instinct, as Martines has suggested, that drove her to the Strozzi lineage, but her own clear and uncompromising view of the future direction for her family.²² F W Kent has shown that the agnatic family provided the primary relationship in the patriciate of fifteenth century Florence and there is no doubt that Alessandra understood and subscribed to this tenet.²³ The Strozzi family remained always more significant for Alessandra in her strong and optimistic belief in the future of her Strozzi sons.

Alessandra’s preference for the Strozzi over her own natal family is illustrated by the numerous references to members of the Strozzi lineage.

¹⁹Strozzi, Lettere, L4, p58 and L12, p123.
²⁰Ibid., L4, p55.
²¹Ibid., L17, Note A, Marco Parenti to Filippo, pp188-9.
Antonio di Benedetto Strozzi, who was renting her family home, was possibly the first Strozzi whose advice Alessandra sought. He was a distant cousin whom Alessandra held in high esteem and whose advice she obviously valued. His election to the Priorate in 1450 was initially perceived as an important step towards the rehabilitation of the Strozzi, but to Alessandra’s loss and that of the lineage, Antonio died soon afterwards.\(^{24}\)

Alessandra also established a close rapport with Niccolò di Lionardo, her husband’s first cousin, who lived in Spain, soon after she arrived in Florence, and she was certainly in communication with him before her eldest son, Filippo di Matteo left the city in 1441. With his brothers Iacopo and Filippo, Niccolò undertook the mercantile education of her sons, for which she most appreciative. She was delighted to extend the hospitality of her home, which she had resumed after Antonio’s death, to Niccolò when he visited Florence. She also availed herself of his services to escort Matteo to Naples.

The various branches of the large Strozzi family were not necessarily closely related, and indeed Antonio di Benedetto was only a sixth cousin of Alessandra’s husband, Matteo.\(^{25}\) The branches were by no means all wealthy or powerful and indeed some household heads with the name of Strozzi were but ‘impoverished relatives of the truly affluent’.\(^{26}\) However, it was the numerical strength

\(^{24}\)Strozzi, \textit{Lettere}, L10, p117, also Note C, pp122-3, for the last reference to Antonio in these letters.


of those of the Strozzi name and their parentadi which enabled Alessandra to maintain close vigilance over most of the other principal citizens in Florence and their doings. Depleted though it was by the exile of several families and handicapped by political ignominy the Strozzi remained a considerable force in the city, and she was able to call on many individual members of the Strozzi parentado as advisers and also as trusted couriers to her sons.

This was by no means a one-way relationship as Alessandra was able to perform many useful tasks for the Strozzi in her position in Florence. Isabella, the natural daughter of Iacopo (Niccolò’s brother) remained in Alessandra’s home in Florence while she arranged a marriage for her.27 Checca, Francesco Strozzi’s sister, and a neighbour of Alessandra, was also Alessandra’s guest for some time while she recovered from illness.28 Alessandra encouraged these visits as indications of family intimacy with the Strozzi, which she maintained to the best of her ability. However, there is no evidence that she herself was ever a guest in a Strozzi home.

Alessandra always strove to take an active part in the life of the Strozzi family and she loved and supported her own daughters, their husbands and children throughout her life. However, there is no question but that her sons were the most important and significant factors, and they remained the focus of Alessandra’s life.

27 Strozzi, Lettere, L9, p111 and ibid., L13, p145. A marriage with Marco di Giovanni de’ Cioni was arranged despite her handicap of shortsightedness. “Abbiamo fatto le nozze; e per quello vegga di loro, mi pare ch’ell’abbia auto una gran ventura: essendo della qualità ch’ell’è, e l’ mancamento della vista corta, come tu sai:’

28 Ibid., L18, pp198-9.
Filippo was born when his mother was twenty-two, the fifth of probably ten children, at least two of whom having died before his birth. He was seven when his father and siblings died in Pesaro, leaving him burdened with the heavy responsibility of ensuring the continuation of his lineage and the restoration of the family honour and fortune under the ever-present threat of political exile.

Educating Filippo for his responsibilities was obviously Alessandra’s prime consideration when the family returned to Florence from Pesaro. Young boys achieved the age of ‘personal and fiscal responsibility’ between thirteen and twenty-two, and usually fourteen in Florence. She would have known that her husband’s twenty-five year term of exile could be extended to her sons when they reached their political majority. In addition, the ‘head tax’ was payable in Florence when a male reached eighteen. It was almost certainly with the intention of avoiding the extension of the punishment that Alessandra sent her sons away although Florentine boys were sent away from home to avoid payment of the head tax.

There is so little information available for the period between 1447 until the end of 1463 that no valid judgment of the young Filippo can be made, nor are there any letters for the first six years after he left home. While additional material from family members and other sources gleaned by Cesare Guasti and other writers provides some knowledge of

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30 Herlihy and Klapisch Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, p138.

31 Ibid., p142.
the young man, the paucity of letters in his formative years leaves us in ignorance of his early life and education.

It is not clear how or when the arrangements were made for Filippo to join his father’s cousins, the brothers Iacopo, Niccolò and Filippo di Lionardo Strozzi, who had mercantile interests in Spain. Matteo di Simone, the young Filippo’s father, had included Iacopo di Lionardo as one of the guardians of his children in a will drawn up in 1429. Florentine born, Iacopo would have appreciated the need for a good start in life for the three fatherless boys. In a letter to Alessandra in 1441 he confirmed that Filippo was to leave Florence to work with him.

When the young Filippo di Matteo joined them in 1441, the brothers were conducting a successful business in Spain, with Filippo di Lionardo in charge of the Barcelona office and Niccolò in Valencia with Iacopo. Filippo di Matteo may have

32 H Gregory, A Florentine Family in Crisis, p186 and footnote, for Iacopo named as one of the tutori in Matteo’s will.

33 L Martines, The Social World of the Florentine Humanists, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1963, p334-5. Lionardo di Filippo Strozzi was Matteo di Simone’s uncle and Iacopo was the eldest of Lionardo’s three sons who undertook the training of Matteo’s three sons.

34 Carte Strozziane, cited by Gregory, ibid., p186.

35 R Goldthwaite, Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence, Princeton, 1968 in a footnote on page 53, cites a company book kept by Filippo di Lionardo in Avignon for the years 1423-1426 showing that he at least of the three brothers was conducting a business away from Florence before the purge of 1434. Dr Gregory claims in her thesis A Florentine Family in Crisis, p186, that they left Florence after the purge in 1434, although she cites no evidence for this assumption and it seems likely
travelled to Spain via Palermo, staying there with
his father’s friend, Matteo di Brandolino, en route
for Valencia, thus supporting an erroneous belief
that he had worked there. It is more likely that
Filippo commenced his banking career with his
cousins in Spain rather than in Palermo with di
Brandolino. Some time after the arrival of Filippo
di Matteo, Iacopo left Spain to open an office in
Bruges. Filippo informed his mother in August
1446 that Niccolò was proposing to start a bank in
Naples on March 25 1447 and that he hoped to join
Niccolò in this venture.

36 By August 1447, when the first of the
collection of letters under discussion was written,
Filippo was certainly already in Naples with
Niccolò. Initially, his cousins were by no means
completely satisfied with the behaviour of the young

that they were, in fact, already established outside
Florence before that time.

36 Gregory, Family in Crisis, presents a well-
argued and cogent explanation of Filippo’s
introduction to the commercial world under the
auspices of Iacopo Strozzi and his brothers in the
terms of Matteo’s will. Goldthwaite, Private
Wealth, p53, holds the conflicting view that Filippo
went first to Palermo to work with Matteo di Giorgio
di Brandolino. Goldthwaite’s work containing such
inaccuracies on Filippo may be based on Guasti’s
research as outlined in his ‘Proemio’ pxxvi.
‘quantunque non ne abbia documento, lo credero’, the
absence of documentation rendering this argument
suspect. Guasti denigrates as inaccurate the
biography of Filippo di Matteo, known as ‘il
Vecchio’, written by his son from his second
marriage. There are numerous biographical
inaccuracies in Filippo’s early life and fails to
mention Filippo’s youngest brother, Matteo di
Matteo. This biography, Filippo Strozzi, il
Vecchio, scritta da Lorenzo, suo figlio, (Eds. G
Bini & P Bigazzi) Florence 1852, was written after
Filippo’s death.

37 Strozzi, Lettere, L1, Note M, p25, ‘Ma più
crede, e spera che lo vorrà menar seco a Napoli.’
Filippo. The nature of his offences was not specified but Alessandra felt obliged to castigate him in response to a complaint from Filippo di Lionardo. Filippo excused himself, in reply, saying that the older man showed him great affection and that if the elder Filippo died without children of his own Filippo di Matteo was confident that he would benefit from the estate. This showed the pragmatic side to Filippo’s character which was to stand him in good stead in life, although unlikely to win him affection. He also mentioned to his mother the affection shown him by Filippo di Lionardo’s wife, which probably offered Alessandra only dubious comfort and which may not have been unconnected with the complaint laid by the husband and Filippo’s departure for Naples with Niccolo. Alessandra reprimanded him firmly, saying that he was no longer a boy and it was time to atone for the wickedness which had caused her much suffering and to remember his good fortune and worship the ground on which Niccolò walked. He was admonished to bear in mind that his obligation to Niccolò was greater than to his own parents; she also enjoined him to keep his hands to himself when he was acting as cashier, probably referring to another complaint.

38 Ibid., Ll, Note M, p26 ‘Filippo, fratello di Niccolò si “teneva malcontento” del suo Filippo’.

39 Gregory, Family in Crisis, p188, citing a letter from Carte Stroziane, III, ‘Ma Pippa m’è fatto e fa vezi a buona compagnia, ch’è una donna molto da bene e piacevole’.

40 Strozzi, Lettere, Ll, pp8-9. ‘Fa’ sopra tutto, figliuol mio, che tu ti porti bene en modo, che dove l’anno passato mi desti tanto dolore de’ tua tristi modi, tu mi dia consolazione’.
This reprimand may well have been administered lovingly - as Alessandra claimed - but was certainly not given lightly. This excerpt provides an early insight into the relationship between Filippo and his mother with Alessandra asserting her parental role at a time when Filippo was emerging as the head of the household.

It was by no means uncommon in the fifteenth century for young men to leave home, and Filippo himself later employed many young relatives in apprenticeship positions in his own business. The treatment accorded these young men at the hands of their employers, with whom they lived and worked, may have been quite harsh though possibly no worse than that meted out in their natal family and home. Filippo’s aggressive behaviour and his resentful manner may well have been caused by physical ill-treatment he himself had received at an early age from his own masters. There is no evidence that Alessandra knew of any such punishment applied to Filippo, but she would probably have felt it justified. However, she entreated him not to ill-treat his youngest brother Matteo in the way he was known to have beaten Lorenzo.

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41 Ibid., L1, p9. 'E se se' cassiere, portati en modo abbia onore; e tieni le mani strette, che'io n'abbia avere più dolore ch'io abbia avuto.' This suggests that he may have helped himself to cash.


44 Ibid., L3, p49, 'E ancora ti ricordo che quando Matteo verrà,...che tu no gli faccia come ho sentito facevi a Lorenzo', and again in L7, p86. 'Ma
Filippo was said to have been of a ‘resentful and aggressive nature’ and in a later opinion of his character, ‘He gives the appearance of being an inflexible and closed sort of man’ who was cautious and determined. He lived for many years isolated from his mother and his siblings, at first more or less by choice and then in exile, which must have contributed to this behaviour. One tantalising note in a letter written by Alessandra to Lorenzo suggests that Filippo’s character may not have been totally without humour as so often suggested. Lorenzo complained that Filippo was always joking with his mother, and that she also joked with him, which is in contrast with the characterisation above. Nevertheless little in Filippo’s lonely life would have been likely to encourage lightheartedness: exiled at the age of six, fatherless at seven and sent away alone to Spain at thirteen with the responsibility for restoring the family honour and fortune. A heavy load indeed for a young boy and one can only agree with his brother-in-law, Marco Parenti, who was to comment that he had never been a child. Alessandra had admonished him when he was nineteen to remember that he was no longer a child and yet continued to remind him from

Strozzi, Lettere, Guasti (Ed), ‘Proemio’ pxxix. ‘che pare fosse di natura risentito e manesco’.

Phillips, The Memoir of Marco Parenti, p79.

Strozzi, Lettere, L42, p369. ‘Ebbi nella tua quella di Filippo. Di’ che sempre motteggiava; ed io ancora motteggero con lui, che glie ne dirò qualche motto.’

Ibid., L3, Note E, p52 ‘che forse non fusti mal fanciullo’.

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time to time of his obligations to the cousin, Niccolò, who was acting in loco parentis.

When Niccolò travelled to Florence at the beginning of 1450 he entrusted the twenty-one-year-old Filippo, who had acquired his banking skills from Niccolò himself, with the responsibility for the business in Naples. Filippo had obviously overcome the handicap of the misdemeanour to which his mother had referred two years earlier and had learned his lesson to good effect.50

Within five years he was established in Naples on his own account and he was accredited as a 'correspondent' for the Medici Bank in Naples in 1455, in the name of Filippo Strozzi & Co, three years before the imposition of exile.51 The details of the capital acquisition for this are not fully understood and no source of funds for Filippo to establish himself independently has yet been traced.52 Alessandra sold property when possible to provide capital, although almost certainly insufficient for this purpose.53 It can be surmised

49 Ibid., L5, pp67-8. 'Veggo Niccolò alla partita sua t'ha lasciato il carico del governo di costì, e tutto ha rimesso in te: che mi pare abbi usato inverso di te un gran liberalità, e grande onore t'ha fatto, e grande amore ti porta;...'

50 Ibid., L1, pp8-9.


52 One of the cousins was also named Filippo and it may be that the company name 'Filippo Strozzi & Co' was a device by which the experienced older men sought access to new business through their younger cousin.

53 Gregory, Family in Crisis, p202, believes that Filippo probably undertook 'entrepreneurial activities on his own account' in order to raise capital. She writes that as early as 1459 Filippo and Lorenzo were discussing the establishment of their own business and there appeared to be no
that funds may have emanated from the Medici themselves, his father's political opponents.\textsuperscript{54} This could also account for later communication between Filippo and Piero di Cosimo.\textsuperscript{55} Filippo was not able to foresee any business future for himself in Florence and when he ultimately returned to that city to live he maintained his mercantile interests in Naples.

Filippo was always supported by his mother in his ambition to return, and she encouraged him to regard Florence as his home. Alessandra had written to him as early as November 1448 of the 'casetta' adjoining her home which had been sold to Donato Rucellai, saying that she wished she were able to buy the property so that it could be added to the family home.\textsuperscript{56} Filippo's desire to embrace the Florentine way of life and marriage was obviously his own reasoned decision and personal choice.

Alessandra and Filippo possessed a strong similarity of character, each tenacious and determined, reserved but with an underlying sense of humour which enabled communication and understanding

\textsuperscript{54}This would have been a mutually advantageous and essentially pragmatic move and would have given the Medici access to the Court at Naples, where Filippo was held in some respect, while perhaps permitting Filippo access to Florentine business. There is no evidence for this supposition, although there was obviously communication between Filippo and the Medici as shown in the letters.

\textsuperscript{55}Strozzi, Lettere, L46, Note A, p412. This letter was written by Piero di Cosimo ten years after the appointment, although Alessandra may have been encouraging this friendship from the Florentine end for some time.

\textsuperscript{56}Ibid., L2, pp38-9, '...Che gitterebbe un grande accconcio a questa casa.'
between them. Through all her letters to Filippo her tone remained maternal, personal and intimate and it is obvious that however difficult his nature she loved Filippo dearly for himself and not only as the eldest son and head of the household. Alessandra supported him financially, morally and emotionally and undoubtedly played a significant role in his ambitious drive for wealth and prestige and an equally prominent part in his ultimate return to Florence. She remained his trusted informant of political moves, scrutinies and ballots throughout his exile from Florence. She advised him of all the necessary details of the protracted efforts to find a wife for him in addition to detail of business affairs, of supplies and of goods sent back and forth between Florence and Naples. She ensured that he understood the Florentine way of life by means of her letters, the messengers and couriers carrying personal messages. Her letters provided a continuing litany of deaths of family and friends and occasionally included personal details of her own health. She maintained a close interest in all the minor details of his life as well as his major concerns and her advice, admonitions and detailed descriptions ensured the continuity of their relationship through many vicissitudes.

She never doubted his right to his position as the head of the family but she recognised that it was essential that she supervise, support and guide him morally and financially. In the early years of his absence from home Alessandra was able to help mould his thinking and to form his character by maintaining a mother and son relationship. As Filippo grew older she gradually came to treat him as an equal and to respect his mature judgment, to depend on him and to confide in him as she aged. As a young man, she consulted him about the insurance
she planned to take out on the pregnant Caterina’s life.\textsuperscript{57}

Alessandra had been very disappointed when she learned that Filippo had been in Livorno in 1447, a port city only 100kms from Florence, and had not come to see her.\textsuperscript{58} He had returned once to Florence, in 1454, when he assisted with the case against her Macinghi relatives who were claiming the estate of Zanobi Macinghi.\textsuperscript{59} She made plans to meet him in Rome at Easter 1450 although this meeting did not eventuate.\textsuperscript{60} She was often quite depressed by the separation from her sons and she constantly assured them of her need to see them and of her continued affection and her need to have first hand news of them. Such regular assurance of her love assisted the supportive maternal relationship of which even a dour Filippo could not have been unaware particularly in the early lonely years of his absence from home.

One of the rare occasions on which Filippo weakened in his resolve ‘to rebuild’ the Strozzi lineage in Florence was when Matteo died in exile in 1459. He began to make plans at that time for his mother to live with him in Naples and wrote to his brother Lorenzo that his mother was in agreement

\textsuperscript{57}Ibid., L4, pp59-60, ‘A me parrebbe, essendo in quello stato, pigliarne sicurta che no si perdessi que’ cinquecento fiorini s’hanno avere dal Monte:’

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid., L1, p8, ‘che Iddio il sa, il dispiacere ebbi quando intesi non potevi venire quandì fusti a Livorno.’

\textsuperscript{59}Ibid., L4, Note A, p64, ‘Ma la nostra Alessandra, aiutata dal suo Filippo, che allora si trovava in Firenze’.

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid., L4, p60. ‘Ho pensiero, piacendo a Dio, qua d’aprile venire per quel santo Perdono a Roma:’

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with this idea. The bereavement seemed to awaken a sympathetic side to Filippo's character not previously seen and he travelled to San Quirico, just outside the Florentine boundary, a few months after Matteo's death, to meet his mother. This may have also enabled him to avoid the war in the Kingdom of Naples but Niccolo Ardinghelli reported that this visit was a great comfort to his mother.

The strong maternal bond forged and maintained throughout the long years of exile is shown clearly in Alessandra's letters. She continued to write to Filippo in his maturity as a wealthy banker as she had when he was a young apprentice banker and it is unfortunate that so few of Filippo's letters to his mother remain to enable greater insight into his feelings for her.

Alessandra continued to exert a powerful influence in assisting Filippo to keep up business and political contacts with his native city throughout his long absence, for she well understood the importance of such 'friendships'. By 1464, when the intensive political manoeuvring for the reversal of the ban on Filippo and Lorenzo di Matteo Strozzi began in earnest, the two men, no longer young, were Florentine citizens in all but name.

The relationship between Alessandra and her eldest surviving son, Filippo, was much more complex than that with her other sons. The great affection which they obviously shared enabled them to maintain this long and close relationship, supported by sincere mutual respect. Filippo's own essential

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61 Ibid., L19, Note C, p212, 'Monna Allesandra mi pare che s'accordi con l'opinione mio, che tu spicchi di costa;'

62 Ibid., L21, Note A, p227, 'ne'primi mesi del 60 ebbe la consolazione di abbracciare a San Quirico il suo Filippo, che per fuggire i tumulti del Regno, si era ridotto a Roma.'

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strength enabled him, the son of a politically disadvantaged and impoverished family, to leave Florence as a boy of thirteen, but to return to his native city as one of its wealthiest men.

Lorenzo, Alessandra’s second surviving son, differed from his rather austere elder brother Filippo. He was of an extrovert and gregarious nature, and Alessandra’s feelings for him were often ambivalent as a result of the many problems he caused her. Nevertheless it is possible to glean from the few letters to Lorenzo himself a little of her feelings for him and her relationship with him.

Nothing is recorded of Lorenzo’s life prior to his departure from Florence in February 1447. It is noteworthy that the first letter in this collection, written to Filippo three days after Lorenzo’s fifteenth birthday, did not even mention the birthday although when Matteo (her youngest son) left home in 1450 his mother wrote of him constantly.63

In a letter to his mother on arriving in Valencia in April, Lorenzo showed keen observation for a fourteen-year-old boy, and recognition of Alessandra’s interest.64 With remarkable eloquence

63Ibid., Proemio, (Ed) Guasti, pxxi. Guasti noted that Lorenzo was born in 1430. However, Alessandra herself wrote to Lorenzo in ibid., L11, p127 that he was born in 1432, and that his twentieth birthday had been August 21, 1452. He was thus four years younger than Filippo, with at least one sibling between them, who had probably died in Pesaro with their father. Lorenzo thus would have been just over fourteen, and not sixteen as Guasti claimed, when he left Florence in 1447, which is more consistent with the ages of his brothers at their departure. Filippo left Florence several months before his thirteenth birthday and Matteo left just a few days before his fourteenth. For the purpose of this study these ages will be accepted as the correct birth dates.

64Ibid., L1, Note M, pp27-30.
and an appreciation of beauty and considerable delicacy for one so young, he wrote that even in heaven the women could not be more beautiful than the Spanish women.\footnote{Ibid., L1, Note M, p29, 'E no vedesti mai le più belle donne incelicate, mai: no credo tanto vivere vegga mai le più belle.'} He described their clothes and the lovely slippers made of gold, the silk net worn by the old ladies on their heads with a simple veil in the manner of the Florentine 'towel', and the cap appearing to have wings. He reported on the beautiful houses, and the almonds, cherries and oranges grown with jasmine hedges which he saw as he rode from Barcelona.\footnote{Ibid., L1, Note M, p27-8.}

On a more practical note, he adapted quickly to his new home, and claimed that he already spoke some Catalan (dialect) \footnote{Ibid., L1, Note M, p30. 'E avvisovi come noi andiamo la sera a letto a 5 ore di notte, e leviamoci alle 7 ore:..' See J R Hale, \textit{Renaissance Europe}, Collins, London, 1971, p13 - time was calculated in Italy from sunset and thus '5 hours at night' referred to 5 hours after sunset. As this letter was written in April the sun would have set at about 6pm in modern terms so bedtime would have been 11pm.} with the local shopkeepers and had observed differences in the market when shopping. He had only a few hours sleep, after copying twelve letters in a day at a speed which he believed would amaze his mother.\footnote{Hale, \textit{Renaissance Europe}, p15. Boys came of age politically at fourteen in Florence: at that age he could be summoned to a 'parlamento' and the church regarded 14 as the age when 'knowledge of the nature of mortal sin might be assumed'.} He also sent a gift for Caterina for her marriage. This well-written letter depicts an intelligent, sensitive and impressionable youth, certainly not yet the troublesome and rebellious young man he became later.\footnote{Hale, \textit{Renaissance Europe}, p15. Boys came of age politically at fourteen in Florence: at that age he could be summoned to a 'parlamento' and the church regarded 14 as the age when 'knowledge of the nature of mortal sin might be assumed'.}

Lorenzo's cheerful personality obviously
appealed to Alessandra despite his numerous and worrying peccadilloes. It may be that her husband, who had enjoyed the friendship and companionship of his young humanist peers, had had a similarly gregarious nature. While Lorenzo displayed none of his father's interest in intellectual activities, despite the lucid letter cited above, his liking for the companionship of men seems to have been inherited from the father whom he would scarcely remember.

Lorenzo's football playing and gambling in the company of young friends caused many problems for his mother. He wrote to Filippo in 1452 admitting to many unspecified mistakes and telling his brother that he was aware of the necessity to overcome his many faults in order to regain his reputation. It seemed that his good intentions were to no effect, for only three months later his master, Iacopo Strozzi, also wrote to Filippo to report that Lorenzo would need more than good intentions if he were to moderate his vices and added that 'he takes part in games of chance, at a football game, or the baths and other places where he wastes more time than he should and it does not matter how I threaten him, he takes no notice.' Iacopo wrote to Filippo


70 Strozzi, Lettere, L11, Note E, p132. 'A me bisogna durare fatica a racquistare quello ho perduto, che conosco non è poco.'

71 Ibid., L11, Note E, p133. 'In questo paese, per avere danaro, bisogna si diano ad altri vizi di giuoco...E, come può avere punto di tempo, o al giuoco della palla o a stufe e altri luoghi...Perde
that Lorenzo had fallen and broken his right arm when tackled while playing football, although he had been forbidden the ‘foolishness with the ball’.\textsuperscript{72} He also indulged in other gambling games which were less likely to cause physical damage, although there is little detail available about them except that they took place at the baths or ‘other places’.\textsuperscript{73} Apparently, when he won he wasted the money and when he lost, did unworthy things to recover his losses. Iacopopo must have seriously doubted Lorenzo’s value in his work at times but obviously felt that it was worth persevering with the good-natured young man. Alessandra told him that at twenty years of age he should behave himself and that mistakes could not be put down to ignorance, for he was intelligent enough to know good from evil. She emphasised her disappointment in his behaviour, saying that his inadequacies had caused grave distress to God and herself as well as seriously displeasing Iacopopo.\textsuperscript{74}

\textit{più tempo non bisogna; e per molto ch’io il dica e minacceo, non viene a dir nulla: poco conto tiene di riprensione.’}

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., L11, p133. ‘Iacopopo scriveva tutto addolorato a Filippo, che a’ dì 11 Lorenzo, giocando alla palla, s’era avviluppatò, e nel cadere, volendosi reggere, rotto il braccio destro. E seguita a dire: = Se tu sapessi quante volte gli ho difeso questo giuocaccio della palla e adiratome con lui, ne saresti maravigliato:’ A broken right arm was very inconvenient for Lorenzo’s employer as he needed his clerk to write up his account books, apart from Lorenzo’s own gambling losses.

\textsuperscript{73}Hale, Renaissance Europe, pp27-8. The fifteenth century was a violent period and gambling was ubiquitous. There was an undercurrent of violence in all pastimes, including animal combat and torture, which were carried out in public.

\textsuperscript{74}Strozzi, Lettere, L11, p128. ‘E non so perché tu seguiti le tue volontà; conoscendo, prima ne fai dispiacere a Dio, ch’è sopra tutto; poi a me, che gran passione mi s’è a sentire e mancatemi tuoi; e ’l danno e la vergogna che ne seguita, lascio
Alessandra made her displeasure at Lorenzo's many misdemeanours very clear, telling him that of all her difficulties, his were the greatest and impressed on him the shame and the damage which he could cause her and himself. Handicapped as the lineage was by the political exile already imposed on their branch of the family, it was vital that debt be avoided and the personal disgrace could only cause further dishonour; therefore she had to maintain constant vigilance over him. Alessandra undoubtedly regarded much of Lorenzo's behaviour as inappropriate for an impoverished young man with the political handicap of a Strozzi-in-exile and his way to make in a hard world. She watched his financial affairs very carefully and without her regular admonitions, he may well have become the ne'er-do-well she feared. He could have caused serious damage and dishonour to a family struggling to overcome the serious handicap of political exile and there is no doubt that Alessandra had more trouble with Lorenzo than with her other sons. He was constantly in debt and Alessandra had to remind him frequently of his outstanding taxes and had reluctantly to sell property to pay these imposts at considerable personal cost to her efforts to provide capital to enable Filippo to repair the family fortune. After his accident at football, the irresponsible Lorenzo made a holy vow to the Vergine Annunziata, which, however, seems to have made very

considerare a te: e dispiacere ne fai a Iacopo, e grande.'

Ibid., L13, p143, 'Egli è di nicistà, veduto e casi vostrì, e per la salute vostra, provedere che s'io mancassi, che quello che pervenissì a voi di mio, non vi fussi tolto per le gravezze vostre; fra e quali sarebbe el podere da Pazzolatico.' Again in ibid., L15, p160, 'Anche dispiacere assai n'è l'avere grande gravezza, e più dispiacere n'è la mia che la vostra, che getta maggior danno:'

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little difference to his behaviour.\textsuperscript{76}

Alessandra's disillusionment with him was still apparent six years later when, after serious illness in Bruges, he recuperated in Florence with her.\textsuperscript{77} He had not turned out the person she would wish, she claimed, and she was obviously relieved when he finally left for Bologna.\textsuperscript{78} He suffered various illnesses and his medical expenses were heavy and she found the additional cost a severe burden.

Despite all his misdemeanours and the constant reprimands, Lorenzo had no reason to feel he lacked maternal support as Alessandra regularly sent him the usual domestic items. When he requested a jar of aromatic spices, she reminded him that the best medicine for his stomach was to watch what he put in his mouth - excellent advice then and not bettered in the succeeding five centuries!\textsuperscript{79} It is plain that not all Lorenzo's ill health was serious and that Alessandra clearly recognised the youthful excesses in which he indulged.

Lorenzo did not lose his youthful appreciation of beauty; in this he appears to have differed markedly from his elder brother. He sent Alessandra three tapestries from Bruges which he seems to have

\textsuperscript{76}\textit{Ibid.}, L11, Note F, p134, 'Lorenzo quantunque sviato, s'era votato alla Vergine Annunziata di Firenze, credo, per la caduta fatta in gennaio.'

\textsuperscript{77}\textit{Ibid.}, L12, Note B, p140. Iacopo Strozzi, Lorenzo's master in Bruges, wrote to Alessandra of this illness.

\textsuperscript{78}\textit{Ibid.}, L12, p135-6. 'Lorenzo si partì di qui a di due, e andò a stare duo di en Mugello colla Caterina; e di là si partì a di 4 per la via di Bologna. Honne assa' pena; più perchè none stava della persona come vorrei.'

\textsuperscript{79}\textit{Ibid.}, L13, p146. 'L'alberello dello arimatico ti manderò: ma la migliore medicina che sia allo stomaco è il guardarsi della bocca.'
intended as a gift.\textsuperscript{80} Alessandra eventually admitted that she thought them beautiful and later decided to keep one holy picture which she thought devout and beautiful.

In the following years Alessandra was able to establish a better relationship with Lorenzo as he slowly achieved maturity. She looked forward with considerable pleasure to his proposed visit to Florence in February 1465 and dreamed of his arrival and anticipated with great joy being able to physically embrace him.\textsuperscript{81} When, in the event, he was not granted permission to enter the city as she had hoped, she was bitterly disappointed, although able to see him at the gates.

However, problems with Lorenzo did not entirely cease with his draining of funds from the family coffers in his youth. Filippo was greatly disturbed when he demonstrated interest in marriage with Marietta di Lorenzo di messer Palla Strozzi, a distant cousin who suffered the dreadful disadvantages of being a beautiful orphan with the additional handicaps of a bankrupt uncle and a grandfather who had been exiled. This potentially disastrous marriage was averted at Filippo's insistence.\textsuperscript{82}

Lorenzo next caused a major problem for his

\textsuperscript{80}\textit{Ibid.}, L21, p224 and L22, p230. 'A me paiono belli: serberonne uno, come di'...S'i'trovassi da vendergli bene, gli venderei tramendua. El Volto santo serbero; che e una divota figura e bella.'

\textsuperscript{81}\textit{Ibid.}, L43, p380. 'Pure ho caro ogni vostra; e non ti maravigliare di questa mia, che sono in fantasia aspettando Lorenzo.'

mother when he sought election in 1465 as consular representative for the commercial organisation, La Nazione fiorentina, in Naples. This was seen as a potential setback by both Alessandra and Marco Parenti, at a time when hopes were high for the lifting of the ban. They believed that many Florentines would be displeased by the appointment of an exile to such a prestigious assignment.\(^{83}\) Alessandra regarded the appointment as potentially extremely damaging to the fragile Strozzi cause now that the objective was very close to attainment. Lorenzo was not to be diverted from acceptance and in the event, no ill effects accrued.

It appeared that she was ultimately able to accept the growing maturity of her twenty-seven year old son, despite telling Filippo earlier that Lorenzo's letters contained nothing of importance.\(^{84}\)

After the death in March 1461 of Iacopo who had been a 'father' to him, he remained in Bruges to look after the affairs of Iacopo's estate.\(^{85}\) Even this was not without problems and in 1464 he was threatened by Lodovico and Batista, sons of Francesco di Benedetto, because they disapproved of his management of the estate.\(^{86}\)

\(^{83}\)Ibid., L56, p494, and Note C, p496, 'La Nazione fiorentina in Napoli si era eletta per Console Lorenzo Strozzi; dispiacendo a Firenze, che avesse scelto per l'appunto un esule.'

\(^{84}\)Ibid., L20, p218, 'Avvisa'ti del pensiero aveva fatto Filippo che tu ti rappressassi en qua, e da lui ho lettera che te n'ha avvisato, e cosi Iacopo. Also ibid., L14, p153, 'Da Lorenzo, ho più lettere, e non mi dice cosa d'importanza.'

\(^{85}\)Ibid., L24, Note A, pp239-40, 'Iacopo aveva fatto "el passo" fino dal 26 di marzo.'

\(^{86}\)Ibid., L30, Note A, p290, 'Lodovico e Batista, figliuoli di Francesco di Benedetto, diedero lungamente noia a Lorenzo per quella amministrazione ch'ei tenne della ragione d'Iacopo; cosa preveduto
However, by early 1462 he had begun to attract accolades, which gave Alessandra a great deal of pride and pleasure. Montelupo, one of the retinue accompanying Piero de’ Pazzi on his return to Florence, embraced Alessandra on Lorenzo’s behalf, telling her how good an ambassador he was. She wrote to Lorenzo saying ‘God be praised for the grace and virtue he gave you’.87

Lorenzo was widely travelled, having visited Sicily and Spain, as well as France and England, giving him broad commercial experience, and in 1465 he had joined Filippo in Naples. Alessandra agreed with the latter on a proposed division of the business, with Filippo to remain in control of the bank and Lorenzo to manage the warehouse, and wished them good profits, peace and a long life together. Note Alessandra’s priorities!88

Lorenzo’s position was clearly secondary in the serious matter of finding wives for the exiles with Alessandra regarding the needs of Filippo and the lineage as her first consideration. Only in 1469, after his return to Florence, did Lorenzo finally give up his wish to marry Marietta di Lorenzo,89 and in June 1470, at the age of thirty-eight, he married Antonia di Francesco Baroncelli.90

dalla buona e accorta Alessandra fin dalla morte di quel parente.’

87Ibid., L26, p255. ‘Ringraziamento Iddio, che da lui abbia tutti le virtù e le grazie:’

88Ibid., L50, p454, ‘Dell’esservi compartiti, tu a governo del banco, e Lorenzo al fondaco, ho consolazione. Che Iddio ve ne conceda buon guadagno, e mantengavi lungo tempo en buona pace e amore insieme, com’io desidero!’


90Ibid., L71, Note B, p597.
Alessandra's last letter was written in April 1470, three months before Lorenzo's marriage, so her opinion of this marriage remains unknown, but she would certainly have been pleased that it was arranged by Ferdinand of Aragon, King of Naples.

It seems that Alessandra had a special fondness for this troublesome younger son and did not merely feel obliged by her loyalty to the lineage to ensure that he did not increase the handicaps under which it laboured. Lorenzo almost certainly had a more likeable personality than Filippo, whose temperament was obviously serious and Alessandra responded to that cheerful nature. These letters demonstrate her genuine affection for Lorenzo despite the many difficulties which she faced on his account. He may have held second place to Filippo in the Strozzi lineage, but not necessarily in Alessandra's affections.

In Alessandra Strozzi's life, her son Matteo played a very special role. Born posthumously, he was the last of her ten children and was undoubtedly a great comfort in her grief at the death of her husband and three of her children. He was the object of Alessandra's most tender maternal affection throughout his twenty-five years.

In a lifetime of seeking affection, Alessandra was able to demonstrate without restraint the affection she felt for Matteo and she expressed these feelings in several letters. The depth of her feeling for Matteo was clearly recognised by her family at the time of his departure for Naples.  

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91 Ibid., Proemio pxx-xxi, Guasti (ed).
92 Ibid., L1, p9; L3, pp46-48; L4, p57.
and at his death.\textsuperscript{93}

Her feelings were revealed when Filippo first proposed Matteo joining him in Naples and she wrote that she did not want to send him away so soon. Firstly, he was too little and she would be lonely once Caterina was married, also he was only eleven and there was no need to send him yet as the head tax would not be due until he was sixteen.\textsuperscript{94} As well, he was learning to write and to use the abacus 'for subtraction' and she planned to put him in the bank during the winter.\textsuperscript{95} Alessandra's wish to keep him with her is manifest in everything she wrote, as in this cry from her heart:

\begin{quote}
I do not know how I could send him away from me, as he is young and still needs my guidance and I do not know how I would survive (without him).\textsuperscript{96}
\end{quote}

When he was very ill and she had thought he might die, the doctor told her what she wanted to

\textsuperscript{93}\textit{Ibid.}, L17, Note A, pp184-191, letters from members of the family to Filippo and Lorenzo on this occasion.

\textsuperscript{94}\textit{Ibid.}, L1, p6, 'che non pub esser preso per le gravezze insino e sedici anni...'

\textsuperscript{95}\textit{Ibid.}, L1, p6, 'Del mandare Matteo di fuori, non vorrei per qra; pero che, perch\'e sie piccolo, pure ne sono pi\'o accompagnata, e posso mal fare sanz'esso; almanco tanto la Caterina ne vadia a marito: poi mi parrebbe rimanere troppo sola. Per ora non ho il capo a mandarlo; che se vor\'a esser buono, lo terr\'o qua; che non pub esser preso per le gravezze insino a sedici anni, ed egli ebbe undici di marzo. Hollo levato dall'abbaco, e appara a scrivere; e porrollo al banco,...'

\textsuperscript{96}\textit{Ibid.}, Appendix, p8. 'Io non so come io me lo mandassi, che e piccolo ancora ha bisogno del mio Governo, ed io non so come me vivessi;...'. This letter, edited by Isidoro del Lungo, is appended to the seventy two letters, but is chronologically the third in the sequence, written four days after the second in the collection.
hear, that his delicate constitution required her personal care and that if he became ill while away from her he would be unlikely to survive. Antonio Strozzi and Marco Parenti were in agreement and supported her decision to keep him with her at that time.\footnote{Ibid., Appendix, (Ed) Isidoro del Lungo, p9.}

Alessandra was very pleased with the young boy when he learned to write well at eleven, although he had to write slowly and concentrate hard.\footnote{Ibid., L2, pp33-4, 'E` ancora non ho sollecitudine a scriverti, perché fo iscriverti a Matteo.'} He wrote a reasonable letter on his mother's behalf to his older brother, Filippo.\footnote{Ibid., L1, Note H, p23, a letter from Matteo to his brother Filippo.} Matteo's natural youthful impatience was curbed by his mother insisting on his acting as her scribe and she was proud when Filippo, in Naples, showed one of his letters to Niccolò, who was sufficiently impressed to ask that Matteo should also join his business.\footnote{Ibid., Appendix, p7.} His schoolboy enthusiasm is also shown in his proposal to Filippo that they should adopt a code when writing to each other\footnote{Ibid., L2, Note B, p40.} although a letter of condolence to Filippo on the death of Niccolò's brother showed him to have become more mature and quite a competent letter writer.\footnote{Ibid., L3, pp52-3, letter by Matteo of August 1449.}

Little can be gleaned of Matteo's own character from these letters, which give the reader more insight into the tender loving mother than the son. Matteo's views on the proposed journey to Naples are
unknown, although he probably looked forward with some excitement to joining his older brothers. He was almost certainly less fragile than his mother believed, despite his death at the early age of twenty-five. It was Alessandra's need to keep him in Florence rather than the doctor's supporting opinion about his delicate constitution which gained her a six month reprieve. In July 1448, when the matter of Matteo's departure was being examined much more seriously, Marco Parenti wrote to Filippo that it had been decided to send him with Soldo. 103 However, Alessandra gained a little more time when Soldo became too ill to travel. A certain urgency appeared in the communications with Filippo at this time and he seemed anxious that Matteo should leave for Naples as soon as possible. 104 In December 1449 she conceded that she must finally arrange for Matteo's departure with Niccolo Strozzi. Politically, Matteo would achieve maturity on his fourteenth birthday on the following March first and would become vulnerable to the political machinations of the Commune, although he would not attract the head tax for another two years. It was also essential that he travel before the summer, when epidemics of plague were at their height. 105 Thus a proposed visit to Florence by Niccolo Strozzi was opportune and Matteo accompanied him on his return to Naples in February 1450. For this reason Alessandra found Niccolo's visit a mixed blessing; his arrival gave her great pleasure but his

103 Gregory, *Family in Crisis*, Genealogical Table 1, p209. Soldo di Bernardo Strozzi was Matteo's father's fifth cousin once removed.


105 Herlihy and Klapisch Zuber, *Tuscans*, pp269-277, for mortality rates and seasonal effect on epidemics.
departure, taking Matteo, brought unhappiness to her.\textsuperscript{106} She had sent some of Matteo’s requirements ahead, including his pens and penknives, also slippers, towels and handkerchiefs as well as two inflated balls, probably footballs.\textsuperscript{107} Alessandra became very depressed after Matteo’s departure, especially when she did not hear from him for several months. No doubt he was enjoying his new experiences and had no time to write.

In a revealing letter, Alessandra wrote to Niccolò to ask him if Matteo was proving satisfactory, for he could return to Florence if he were not. She clearly hoped that he was not a success as she was really unable to reconcile herself to losing him.\textsuperscript{108} She had encouraged his learning to write well and to calculate, so that he could take his place with his brothers to bring credit on himself and help to restore the family to its rightful position. Yet she then did everything in her power to prevent his leaving until she was unable to postpone the dreaded moment any longer.

She reminded Filippo to greet Matteo fondly, obviously aware of the effects of deprivation of affection. The only letter to Matteo in this collection shows that she had finally accepted his adulthood at twenty-four and his absence from Florence. Matteo’s death, nine years after leaving home, left Alessandra almost inconsolable and was

\textsuperscript{106}Strozzi, Lettere, L5, p69, ’E mi stato la venuta sua di consolazione; e dispiacere m’è suto la partita del mio Matteo; che ancora non sono in me.’

\textsuperscript{107}Ibid., L4, p58, ’Per Soldo ti mandai due palle gonfiate e un paio di coltellini e una dozzina di penne;’

\textsuperscript{108}Ibid., L6, p81, ’Priego Iddio me ne mandi quelle novelle disidero; che’niuno modo posso alle volte accordarmi a esser contenta averlo levato da me.’

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probably the heaviest blow of the many she had to endure in a life of considerable hardship. However, the image of Matteo must remain little more than that of the schoolboy of his own few letters.

Her relationship with Filippo was based on his primogeniture which she recognised but was only gradually able to accept with his increasing maturity, wealth and importance. She demonstrated that she regarded him as the head of the family, having castigated him for his ill-behaviour, and ensured that thenceforward he was kept fully informed of all business matters concerning it. She exhorted him to work for his eventual return to take his position as head of the family in Florence although the political situation in the city must have been an ever-present worry.

Although Filippo had caused some problems when he was young, he had not been a gambler and he became a responsible banker at quite an early age. The many stages between a mother’s loving though often exasperated perception of him as an obstinate and occasionally disobedient boy and Alessandra’s steps towards her recognition of his ultimate achievement of wealth and the assumption of his rightful role as head of the family, can be followed in the letters.

Alessandra’s feelings for Lorenzo, with his rather rebellious nature but gregarious and appealing personality, are shown to have been affectionate but also eventually accepting of his maturity. Her attitude towards him was always complicated by his gambling and debts. There was no ambivalence in her uncomplicated maternal affection for Matteo.

Just seventy-three of the letters written by Alessandra Strozzi to her sons in exile are left to
provide virtually the only means of assessing her own character and her relationships with her family. They show her changing attitudes to her sons during the twenty-three year period covered by the letters and the strength of the contribution which she made to the development of the character of her two elder sons. The few letters extant from the three men to their mother prevents any assessment of their viewpoint.

Alessandra's letters illustrate one of the means by which this woman in Quattrocento Florence maintained her bonds with her children and remained a focal point for them, while managing the patrimony competently and supporting the family relationships and the necessary social contacts. Alessandra supported her family unit throughout a long period of adversity, maintaining close and affectionate family ties with her sons during their twenty-five year absence from Florence.

The complex relationship between Alessandra as the head of her household, political adviser, financial manager and mother to her sons, is illustrated in her letters which were the means by which she exerted her influence on the direction of the lives and characters of Filippo and Lorenzo. Her dedication to the aspirations of her sons to achieve full restoration of political rights never wavered. Her own strength of character and indomitable spirit enabled her to maintain her maternal relationship with her sons and imbue them with the determination and perseverance which was necessary to ensure their ultimate success.


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GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF MACINCHI IN LETTERS

NICCOLO MACINCHI

FILIPPO

1. CATERINA D'ALBERTO ALBERTI
2. GINEVRA D'ALBERTUCCIO RICASOLI

GIOVACCHINO

1. CATERINA D'ANTONIO PORTINARI

CARLO

1. ANTONIO RICCARDO

FRANCESCO

MACHINE

ANTONIO GASPINO

CAPALDI

MARIA DI GIULIANO VECCHI

ALESSANDRA

MATEO DE SIMONE STROZZI

ZANOBII

ANTONIO

CATERINA

GIOVAGIO DI FRANCESCO CANIGIANI

GINEVRA

NICCOLO DI LORENZO SODERIN

ANDREOLI SIMONE ANDREOLI FILIPPO PIERO LORENZO CATERINA LESANDRA MATEO

BORN 1424 1426 1427 1427 1428 1429 1430 1432 1434 1436
DIED 1424 1427 1435 1435 1435
## REFERENCES TO MACINGHI FAMILY

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<td>Antonio di Filippo</td>
<td>Half brother</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caterina di Giorgio Canigiani</td>
<td>Half sister</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginevra di Niccolò Soderini</td>
<td>Half sister</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>First cousin</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macinghi Family</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm at Antella</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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A WOMAN'S LIFE CYCLE

The letters of Alessandra Strozzi do not record a great deal of detail of her own life as a woman. Nevertheless an examination of her letters from this angle seems worthwhile since we have so little material written by women, and there are stages in the life cycle of women which her letters do illuminate, pertaining to the course of the menarche, childbirth, climacteric and old age. There is also a great deal of material in the letters relating to the diseases suffered by her family and friends and the effect of deaths on the family.

Despite the limited knowledge of female anatomy and no understanding of the female physiology, increasing interest had begun to be shown in gynaecological conditions and the health of women.\footnote{O'Faolain and L Martines (Eds), Not in God's Image, London, 1973, p121. Knowledge of female anatomy remained unknown for 'a thousand years after Galen'. See also I.Maclean, The Renaissance Notion of Women, Cambridge, 1980, pp39-40. It was believed that the uterus was an animal in its own right, endowed with powers of movement from the abdomen to the throat, within the body.}

The previously short life span of women gradually improved in the fifteenth century, and it is possible that medical practitioners who specialised in the diseases of women were becoming known in the Quattrocento, although the treatment was carried out by female assistants.\footnote{J V Ricci, The Genealogy of Gynaecology, Philadelphia, 1943, p287. See also D Herlihy and C Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, 'Duration of Life', Yale University Press, New Haven, pp83-86. See also H R Lemay, Anthonius} Medical help was rarely
sought for parturient women and midwives normally attended women in labour.\textsuperscript{3}

Women attained their menarche between fourteen and sixteen years, the age at which ‘they went to their husbands’. They then bore their children at fairly regular intervals until the death of husband or wife. Amid this fecundity, childbearing was responsible for at least one-fifth of the deaths of married women in Florence.\textsuperscript{4} Most of these maternal deaths occurred as the result of puerperal infection, while a very few were probably due to abnormal foetal presentation and inappropriate pelvis conformation.

Alessandra apparently did not suffer any difficulties in the birth of her ten children, and she had no obvious continuing gynaecological problems. She was pregnant for over seven years of the fourteen years of her marriage, followed by ten to fifteen unproductive although fertile years in widowhood prior to the menopause which probably occurred at around forty-five years of age.\textsuperscript{5} The

\textsuperscript{3}I Origo, \textit{The Merchant of Prato}, Hamondsworth, 1957, p303.

\textsuperscript{4}D Herlihy and C Klapisch-Zuber, \textit{Tuscans and their Families}, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1980, p277. The mortality rate in Florence between 1424 and 1430 was approximately 14.5 maternal deaths for every 1000 births, i.e., one of every 69 women died from puerperal complications.

\textsuperscript{5}L Stone, \textit{The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800}, Abridged Edition, Hamondsworth, 1978, p310-311. Stone writes that the menarche probably occurred at fourteen to fifteen and the menopause at forty-four, and that there are no
great age difference in marriage partners in Quattrocento Florence led to a preponderance of widows and at least 10% of women were widowed by forty which could have given a misleading view of the age of the actual cessation of childbearing.

In the fifteenth century it was unlikely that symptoms commonly associated in modern times with the climacteric were recognised as gynaecological and each symptom was treated in isolation. In the seven letters written in the years 1450 to 1453, when Alessandra, in her mid-forties, may be considered to have been menopausal, she did not mention any specific gynaecological problems, and she would not have mentioned any such problems in letters to her sons. It is possible that such matters were discussed with her daughters and sisters although there is no evidence for this. She became quite depressed after her youngest child, Matteo, left Florence to accompany Niccolò Strozzi to join Filippo in Naples. This may have been a perfectly natural loneliness following the departure of her beloved son, which was exacerbated by the onset of the climacteric, as she was then forty-six. During one period of depression she arranged contemporary references to the menopause.

6 The term 'menopause' is applied to the cessation of a woman's ovum production and fertile life. Luckmann & Sorenson, Medical-Surgical Nursing, Philadelphia, 1974, p1871. Symptoms experienced during the climacteric could include headaches, flushes, excessive perspiration, insomnia as well as depression.

7 Ibid., p1871. About 85% of women experience some symptoms during the climacteric.

8 P Crawford, 'Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England', Past and Present, May 1981, No 91, p55. Before the seventeenth century, there was no recognised term in English for the menopause, which simply refers to the period after
for her daughter, Lesandra with her husband Giovanni Bonsi and children to live in her house with her, a practical measure which demonstrates her own insight into her problem and her ability to cope appropriately with the continual stress caused by the absence of her sons.\textsuperscript{9}

The epidemics of bubonic plague clearly caused the greatest danger to health in the fifteenth century, and contemporary medical tracts claimed that females were at greater risk from plague than males.\textsuperscript{10} However, Carmichael's later study shows that of deaths between 1424 and 1457, only in the year 1449 were there more female deaths than male.\textsuperscript{11} If women survived the risks associated with childbirth, being more susceptible to infection by plague during pregnancy and lactation, they were at no greater risk of death from bubonic plague than men and had a greater chance of survival to old age. This dreaded disease had drastically reduced the population of the city during the previous hundred years, and continued to erupt at frequent intervals in Alessandra's lifetime. Alessandra has provided firsthand information in her letters of the havoc wreaked on the population of Florence, rich and poor, by the recurrent epidemics of bubonic plague. There was little understanding of epidemiology and medical practice had no relevance to the

the climacteric, the gradual cessation of the menses. It is likely that there was no word in Italian either, which now uses 'menopausa'.

\textsuperscript{9}Strozzi, Lettere, L15, p161.

\textsuperscript{10}Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, p274.

\textsuperscript{11}Ann Carmichael, Plague and the poor in Renaissance Florence, University Press, Cambridge, 1986, Graph 4-1, p93 for a comparison of male and female deaths between 1424 and 1457.
The Government of Florence under 1966, p49 Otto di Custodie, or branch of political police, in onslaught of the 'Plague'. The health systems of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were said to amount to 'little more than a formulated ignorance' with no knowledge of bacterial infection and how to deal with it. Prophylaxis in major outbreaks was limited to flight from perceived sources of disease and later to isolation of those who succumbed. In the absence of a communal health authority, additional powers were granted in 1448 to the Eight Custodians to preserve public health.

Antonio di Benedetto Strozzi, who had been drawn for the Signoria during one devastating epidemic in which 800 died, described the extreme difficulty encountered in carrying out the duties of government, especially in arranging a treaty with the King of Naples. In Florence the flight of the well-to-do to their country villas left the poor, who had no choice but to remain in the city, 'unemployed and destitute'. The Signoria commissioned extra priests, four physicians, four surgeons, forty women and twenty men to care for the sick poor in one outbreak. The enforced movement from city and back to escape the plague also severely disrupted commercial and personal life. The statistics provide data that almost 70% of plague deaths were attributable to bubonic or 'true' plague, with the remainder due to other epidemic

12 Carmichael, Plague & the Poor, pp5-9.


15 Strozzi, Lettere, L11 Note A, p90.

16 Carmichael, Plague and the Poor, p102.
diseases such as smallpox. Not all the deaths so attributed were in fact caused by the bacillus, Yersinia Pestis, the cause of the true plague. However, the undertakers were 'particularly scrupulous in recording deaths from plague' by means of a large 'P' before the name and 'di Segno' after the entry in Libri dei Morti.

Alessandra Strozzi's personal experience of the plague in her own family enabled her to recognize that Benedetto Strozzi (Antonio's brother), who died after an illness of only two days with 'una posta', or bubo, had the sign of the true plague. This classical sign had been accurately described in the previous century by Boccaccio to indicate the onset of the disease and its signs quite vividly: '... it began in both males and females with swellings in the groin or under the arms, which grew to the size of a common apple, and others like an egg, some more and others less, which the common people called buboes.'

In the epidemic of 1450, when the plague reached the rural areas, Alessandra recorded that the deaths with 'the sign' had already ceased in

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17 Herlihy and Klapisch Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, p276. Of 4657 deaths in Florence, 1424-1430, 3196 were caused by the plague, or approximately 68.6%.

18 Carmichael, Plague and the Poor, p7. The bacillus was renamed in 1971 from Pasteurella pestis to Yersinia pestis in honour of a student of Louis Pasteur. Epidemics of smallpox and influenza often occurred concurrently with the recurrent true plague, pp13-15.

19 Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron, Mursia, Milano, 1984, p30. '...ma nascevano nel cominciamento d'essa a' maschi e alle femine parimente o nell' anguinaia o sotto le ditella certe enfiature, delle quali alcune crescevano come una comunala mela, altre come uno uovo, e alcune più e alcune meno, le quali i volgari nominavan gavoccioli.'
Florence. During this great outbreak in the country, twelve workers on Alessandra’s farm at Campo died and the remainder were ill, leaving no one to bring in the harvest. Houses were left empty everywhere and there was not a villa from Peretola to Prato in which someone had not died and the workers were said to be terrified by so many deaths. On the other hand, when the disease began to recur every fifteen days in the city, it particularly affected the workers in the city, and Giovanni Bonsi had to keep his workers at his country villa in the Mugello to avoid contagion.20

Alessandra continued to record with remarkable accuracy the number of deaths which occurred during these devastating outbreaks. She reported ‘four or five deaths a day’ caused by La Morla in 1448.21 The ‘sign’ referred to the specific diagnostic signs of the presence of buboes, purpura and haemoptysis.22 She also wrote that it was being said that eleven had died with the sign of bubonic plague.23

20Ibid., L28, p274.

21 Strozzi, Lettere, L2, p37, ‘La morla ci fa pur danno, da quattro a cinque per dì; e a’dì 29 del passato si disse che n’era undici di segno:

22 Specific diagnostic signs of bubonic plague included buboes, (swellings, particularly in the groin or axilla), and haematemesis or haemoptysis (spitting or coughing of blood). Other well recognized signs were petecchiae or carbone, (haemorrhagic rash or necrotic skin lesions). Carmichael, Plague and the Poor, p23 and p34, specific diagnoses were made by the gravediggers based on the visible signs.

23 Ibid., L2, p37, ‘si disse che n’era morti undici di segno;’ Guasti (ed), ibid., p37 footnote, ‘di segno’ was the ancient medical term for ‘the urine of illness’ but was also used to designate plague, although this definition is not found in the Vocabolario della Crusca. See also Carmichael, Plague and the Poor, p13. Listed are peste,
that not a day went past that plague had not caused twenty or twenty-four deaths. Alessandra’s figures are supported by Carmichael’s study in which it is claimed that of the twenty deaths per day in the months of July and August, at least eighteen were due to bubonic plague.

A few months later, the well-to-do people were reported to be again dying from the plague, including two sisters of Alessandra de’ Bardi Strozzi. The increasing deaths in patrician families exacerbated Alessandra’s worry concerning her two unmarried sons as the parentado of eligible young girls was damaged by the death of so many relatives. Alessandra’s nephew, the son of her half-sister Caterina, who was a Brother at the Badia of Florence died of the plague and eight others died at the same time.

Alessandra kept her sons informed of the births, deaths and marriages of the extended Strozzi lineage, and if her letters appear to display a

*pestilenzia*, or *pistolenzia*, and *morbo* and *p79*, *mortalita* and *di segno*.

Alessandra, Lettere, L3, p48, ‘...la morìa che ci fa danno, che ci è dì ne va venti o ventiquattro:’

Carmichael, Plague and the Poor, Graph 3-6, p69.


Kent, Household and Lineage, pp93-5 defined parentado as ‘The family relationship created by marriage.’. See also Gregory, ‘Daughters, Dowries and the Family in Fifteenth Century Florence’ in Rinascimento, Vol.XXVII, pp224-230, who says that; ‘On one level the term parentado is simply defined, as a man’s relations by marriage,...’

Strozzi, Lettere, L61, pp524-5. Caterina’s son died in Rome and the eight other deaths probably occurred in Rome also.
preoccupation with illness and death, it is scarcely surprising in view of the ravages of the frequent epidemics of plague, undoubtedly the most deadly disease encountered in the fifteenth century. Alessandra herself survived the epidemics of the first half of the century, after losing her husband and three of her young children to an epidemic in 1435 while in exile in Pesaro. Her parents-in-law and her husband’s only sibling had succumbed in the severe epidemic of 1424, not long after her marriage, and two young daughters died early of unknown causes at about the same time.

Many deaths occurred in the large Strozzi family in one epidemic and such deaths were always of significance because of the loss to the whole lineage. The parentado of eligible young girls was damaged by the death of large numbers of relatives, and when the well-to-do and patrician citizens were again reported to be dying from the plague, Alessandra’s worry concerning her two unmarried sons was exacerbated. Two sisters of Alessandra de’ Bardi Strozzi were among those who died at this time and Alessandra’s nephew, the son of her half-sister Caterina, who was a Brother at the Badia of Florence, died of the plague and eight others died at the same time.

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29 Ibid., L4, p57 ‘Ancora morì F. della Luna; che n’è stato un gran danno. E qua morì Antonangiolo Macigni, e molti altri nostri parenti degli Strozzi.’

30 F W Kent, Household & Lineage, Princeton, 1977, pp93-5. Parentado is defined as ‘The family relationship created by marriage...’ See also H Gregory, ‘Daughters, Dowries and the Family in Fifteenth Century Florence’, in Rinascimento, Vol XXVII, pp224-230, ‘On one level the term parentado is simply defined as a man’s relations by marriage,...’

31 Strozzi, Lettere, L61, pp524-5.
Perceptions of health and disease in the Quattrocento were severely restricted by the limited knowledge of the period, and the medical profession was ignorant and helpless in the face of the ubiquitous plague.32 There was little understanding of epidemiology and medical practice had little relevance to the onslaught of the 'Plague'.33 Despite this, medical practitioners were generally held in high regard by the Florentine community, although this esteem for them was by no means universal.34

Alessandra herself had a poor opinion of doctors at times and she explained to her son, Filippo, that in time of great need it was all too easy to believe what one wished to hear, quoting the doctor saying to a sick person that he would not die of his illness and would be better in a few days, thus comforting him whether he recovered or not.35

32 P. Ziegler, The Black Death, Harmondsworth, 1969, pp68-9. The works of Galen were based on the ancient philosophy of Hippocrates and Aristotle, which in turn were translated from Greek into Arabic and then from Arabic into Latin, many centuries after the loss of the original Greek.

33 Herlihy and Klapish-Zuber, Tuscan and their Families, Table 4.8, p129. Bankers' income was f.8748.4 and lawyers, f.1079.2, while doctors only had an average income of f.460.9. See also K Park, Doctors and Medicine in Early Renaissance Florence, University Press, Princeton, 1985, p71.

34 Origo, The Merchant of Prato, p300, citing Petrarcha, Lettere Senili, Petrarch, the great poet, wrote to a friend that the doctors had despaired of his life when he had a fever and the only remedy they could offer was to prevent him sleeping. He instructed servants and friends to ignore the instructions of physicians, he was allowed to sleep and ultimately recovered.

35 Strozzi, Lettera, L46, p406. 'Pure fo come lo 'nfermo, che pe' conforti del medico, quando dice "Tu non hai a perire di questo male, ma fra pochi di sarai sano",...E quando riesce, e quando non.'
The death of Pandolfo Pandolfini in Naples, after the doctors had found him to be afebrile, appeared to replicate the circumstances of the death of her son Matteo, also in Naples. Both were thought to be recovering when they died and Alessandra exclaimed with heavy irony that the 'doctors there must have been very clever!'

Alessandra's own doctor in Florence, Maestro Lodovico, had treated her frequently and without receiving payment until 1465 when Alessandra gave him a length of damask as a gift for his daughter. She recorded only one visit by a doctor, which was for Checca, and not for herself. Checca, Francesco Strozzi's sister, became ill while staying with Alessandra and had a continuous fever for eighteen days, although the doctor said it was lo stomaco and just a little matter. She offered very sensible advice to Lorenzo when he complained of a stomach ailment, telling him to take care what he ate and drank.

She described accurately the apoplectic stroke suffered by Giovanni della Luna in March 1462, saying that he was paralysed on his right side and was unable to speak, indicative of a left sided cerebro-vascular accident, for which condition he must have received reasonable nursing care to

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36Ibid., L57, p500.
37Ibid., L45, p.397. 'Hamm medicato assa' volte, e non ha 'uto danaio:'
38Ibid., L18, p198, 'La nostra Checca è stata da diciotto di ammalata di febbre continova; ora gli è scemata, che n'ha piccola cosa, secondo el medico.'
39Ibid., L18, pp198-9. 'lo stomaco' on this occasion referred to Checca being unable to retain her food.
40Ibid., L13, p146, '..la migliore medicina che sia allo stomaco è il guardarsi della bocca.'
survive for two years.\(^4^1\)

Florentine records of causes and ages at death are incomplete, particularly for women, as 'household heads (were) more conscientious in reporting the deaths of males rather than females.'\(^4^2\) In the records of deaths, women are shown to have died of 'old age' in greater numbers than men, although the actual age is unspecified. Searches of headstones and memorial plaques have been undertaken to support the records of female deaths.\(^4^3\) However, 'Once past child-bearing years, women naturally had a much greater chance of survival to old age...'.\(^4^4\) More women than men were listed as dying of old age, or reaching a 'natural termination' known as vecchjaia.\(^4^5\) The criteria for determining old age were not defined specifically in the official records, although it was almost certainly about sixty years.

In the years of plague epidemics, plague was undoubtedly the most common cause of death. However, a compilation derived from the Grascia Morti and Libri dei Morti between 1424 and 1457,

\(^4^1\)Ibid., L26, p256. 'Giovanni della Luna duo di gli cadde la gocciola: ha perduto tutto il lato ritto, e non favella,...'

\(^4^2\)Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, p259.

\(^4^3\)Ibid., p259. See also D Herlihy, 'Life Expectancies for Women in Medieval Society' in The Role of Women in the Middle Ages, New York, 1975, pp3-4. Women achieved that memorial only if they died young and before their husband - a rare combination, in the light of the disparate ages at marriage with the fundamental characteristic of fifteenth-century Tuscan marriage being the great age gap.

\(^4^4\)Carmichael, Plague and the Poor, p38.

\(^4^5\)Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, p274.
shows that in non-plague years, deaths from unspecified old age exceeded all other causes combined. These exceeded deaths from the combined diarrhoeal diseases by only 145, although in a study of the years only from 1424 to 1430, deaths from diarrhoea exceeded those from old age by 15. Diarrhoea (mal di bachi) was especially dangerous for infants and very young children, while dysentery (mal di pondi) was a major cause of death in older people, especially males. Dysentery was endemic, not surprisingly, in view of the use of the River Arno to supply drinking water and as a sewer.

Alessandra suffered from dysentery in an epidemic of 1449, and two years later she complained of mal di stomaco. She also had male di scesa, or upper respiratory tract infections, several times and she complained that day by day she was becoming older and more unwell. She referred to herself as suffering from the diseases of old age when still in her early forties, and by fifty-nine, Alessandra claimed that she was always 'rattling' like all old women. This was almost certainly due to chronic chest infection, which was probably bronchitis.

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46 Carmichael, Plague and the Poor, Table 2-3, p36. In 1457, the last year quoted in this table, there were 899 deaths from plague, 102 from old age and 58 from 'illness'.

47 Carmichael, Plague and the Poor, Table 2-3, p47, Male de'pondi was the third greatest cause of death between 1425 and 1456. Mal di stomaco = sick, nauseated, pains in the stomach.

48 Herlihy & Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans & their Families, p276 and also Carmichael, Plague & the Poor, p39. 'Mal di scesa', was a catarrhal infection which, with other respiratory diseases, was common in Florence in the fifteenth century.

49 Strozzi, Lettere, L2, p33.

50 Ibid., L40, p353, 'ed io mi sto come le vecchie, che sempre crocchiano'.

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Later she was still unable to do much because she was still 'crackling', and full of 'scesa',\(^{51}\) and she also had a fever with swelling from head to foot which lasted for several days.\(^{52}\) Despite these conditions, she maintained reasonably good health for most of her life, with just one severe attack of dysentery, and occasional winter chest infections, indicating a relatively healthy woman. In fact, she survived to the age of sixty-six, at a time when the average age at death of Florentine citizens was approximately forty years.\(^{53}\)

In her last years, she did complain of feeling weak in the head, that her brain was spinning and she felt more dead than alive, the symptoms suggesting that she was now suffering from hypertension.\(^{54}\) These symptoms of high blood pressure in her sixties are indicative of the only condition likely to cause her death.

Not until Alessandra was in her late fifties did she acquire spectacles and she wrote with delight of how easy it then became to understand her

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\(^{51}\)Ibid., L43, p379, 'ma posso poco, che `tuttavía crocchio', and on p.380, 'che sono piena di scesa'.

\(^{52}\)Ibid., L41, p357. This general swelling may have been an allergic reaction, but was more likely excess fluid, due to hypertension.

\(^{53}\)Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, Tuscans and their Families, p85 and p195. It has been established from the Catasto of 1427 that there were people over ninety years of age, which statistically offset the high mortality rate in the very young.

\(^{54}\)Strozzi, Lettere, L41, p357, and L44, p387, 'che poi parti Lorenzo no mi sono sentita bene, en modo che ho mangiato dell'uo...ma i'ho molto debole il capo, e alle volte pare che il cervello mi si volga.' Untreated hypertension or high blood pressure could present such symptoms.
writing. It must have been exceedingly difficult for her to write her long letters for so many years without the assistance of corrective lenses.

Alessandra was sixty-six when she died, when fewer than 5% of the population of Florence lived more than sixty-five years and her last letter, written not long before she died, showed her usual grasp of the details of business and no deterioration in her intellectual faculties.

Alessandra was obviously a woman of considerable physical strength who survived the birth of ten children and chronic chest infections and occasional dysentery, without succumbing to any of the regular epidemics of bubonic plague. She also withstood the loneliness of bearing her children without the support of close family. A woman of great moral and psychological strength, she overcame the many tragedies and handicaps of her life.

She displayed remarkable courage in emerging from the period of her husband's exile and death, and the deaths of several of her children, to return to Florence determined to have the honour and the wealth of her family restored.

Her early isolation as an orphan, followed by exile, widowhood and the deaths of her husband and children, placed a crushing and lonely burden on the young woman, and she called on her great inner resources to enable her to surmount a lifetime of loneliness.

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55 Ibid., L39, p347, 'Questa mia è scritta cogli occhiali: releggete e rivolgete più d'una volta, tanto che la intendiate bene.'
DISEASES REFERRED TO IN THE LETTERS

PLAGUE
1448 Letter 2 - 11 deaths on 29 October
   November - 4/5 deaths daily.
1448 Appendix - ? deaths.
1449 Letter 3, July - 20/24 deaths daily.
   Antonangio10 Macinghi & Filippo di Lionardo
   Strozzi died.
1449 Letter 4, December - 5/6 deaths daily.
   Francesco della Luna & Margherita di Pippa
   Manetti died.
1450 Letter 6, June - 12 dead on one farm and one in
   almost every house.
1450 Letter 7, October - many deaths.
1458 Letter 12, September - Benedetto Strozzi died.
1464 Letter 28, March - workers - many deaths.
1464 Letter 31, April - Piero Piaciti and 2 servants
   died.
1464 Letter 34, May - plague in Naples - many
   deaths.
1464 Letter 35, June - 2 sisters of Alessandra di
   Lorenzo Strozzi died plus others.
1465 Letter 55, October - Giovanni Bartoli, wife and
   daughter-in-law died.
1465 Letter 58, November - Meo Pecori’s son,
   Saracino Pucci’s son, Rinieri da Ricasoli’s
   mother, his slave and his natural daughter
   died.
1465 Letter 63, December - Francesco Caccini died.

DYSENTERY
1449 Letter 4, December - Alessandra recovered.
1450 Letter 7, August - Francesco Strozzi died.
1454 'Libro', September 1454 - Antonio Strozzi
   died.
1459 Letter 18, November - Checca Strozzi recovered.

CHEST DISEASES
1448 Letter 2, November - Alessandra recovered.
1465 Letter 40, January - Alessandra recovered.
1465 Letter 54, September - Strozza Strozzi
   recovered.

MALARIA
1459 Letter 17, August - Matteo di Matteo died.
1459 Letter 17, August - Niccolo Strozzi recovered.
1459 Letter 18, November - Antonio Macinghi died.
1465 Letter 55, October - Pandolfo Pandolfini died.

GOUT
1464 Letter 36, September - Cosimo di Medici died.
1465 Letter 55, October - Piero di Cosimo (d.1469).
1465 Letter 63, December - Giovanni di Cosimo died.
MISCELLANEOUS DISEASES

KIDNEY
1461 Letter 23, March - Iacopo Strozzi died.

STROKE
1464 Letter 32, April - Giovanni della Luna died.

HYPERTENSION
1465 Letter 41, January - Alessandra recovered.
1465 Letter 44, March - Alessandra recovered.

DEPRESSION
1449 Letter 4, December - Alessandra & 6 other references.
1461 Letter 61, December - Bernardetto de' Medici died.
CONCLUSION

The letters of Alessandra Strozzi have proved particularly valuable in assessing the active contribution made by women to the world of Renaissance Florence. In this study, Alessandra’s practical contribution to the success of her ambitious son, Filippo di Matteo, in a society in which women had neither franchise nor direct access to government, is illustrated in her own words. Her letters are lucid and eloquent despite the apparently limited education of the writer, and they are particularly valuable in illustrating that despite their lack of opportunity to take part in government, women could own the skills to carry out most commercial transactions without hindrance. The letters have also offered some insight into the life of this patrician woman.

Alessandra’s enduring belief in the future of her sons obviously arose initially from her own family and then from her relationship with the members of the Strozzi parentado. Her background provides the origins of the indomitable character which enabled her to make her contribution to the achievement of her objective. The Macinghi, her natal family, had demonstrated a persistent ambition despite continuing financial difficulties, to raise their standing in the community, in which they persevered with some success within Alessandra’s lifetime. The men of the Alberti, her mother’s patrician family, were exiled and they left behind wives who played a strong and significant role and who were to provide powerful models for Alessandra in the later exile of her own family. The Alberti and the Macinghi offered little practical assistance to the young widow but her early life experiences
undoubtedly contributed to her strength of character and her independent spirit.

Alessandra's greatest external support came from the Strozzi, and in particular from her husband's first cousins who provided the essential training in mercantile banking for the future of her sons. She was sustained by the loyalty and reassurance of support from the wide Strozzi parentado in maintaining the continuing interest of relatives and friends. She formed an essential network of amici, parenti and vicini among the principal citizens of Florence, many of whom were related distantly by marriage and who greatly assisted her in achieving her goal. She also had the support of her sons-in-law, particularly Marco Parenti. Yet it was Alessandra herself who had ultimately to make the decisions on taxation, the selling of property and on matters under litigation.

Alessandra never allowed her pride in, and devotion to, her husband's family name to be undermined by her position as a politically disadvantaged widow in the Florentine patriarchal society. Her ability to comprehend the complex political machinations of the Florentine ruling faction was especially valuable. Although only the last eight of the twenty-five years which Filippo and Lorenzo were away from Florence were actually spent under the sentence of exile, the threat had been ever-present.

Alessandra frequently expressed her wish for the affection which had clearly been a deeply-felt lack in her life. She had spent a large part of her own life without overt demonstrations of affection being extended to her within her family from the time of the early death of her mother. If exiles suffered from the 'desperate unhappiness and sense

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of isolation' described by Baxendale, Alessandra Strozzi certainly suffered the 'desperate unhappiness' equally. She was conscious of the deprivation of affection for them and for herself throughout the time of their exile, and her long separation from them occasioned periods of depression. This suffering also gave her insight into the grief endured by members of her family and she wrote compassionately of the deaths of members of the family.

As a Florentine widow in straitened economic circumstances with a family to support on a small income, the letters show that Alessandra always knew her financial priorities. As the manager of family affairs, she dismissed the elderly sharecroppers to take whatever charity God provided them, and such incidents could lead to a view of Alessandra as lacking in compassion. However, her own family was always more important, despite any possible moral obligation to others. When she took out insurance on Caterina's life, contrary to the wishes of Marco Parenti, Caterina's husband, it was not lack of affectionate maternal feelings, but rather a need to ensure that the possible loss of her daughter and her dowry did not harm her family financially as well as emotionally. Alessandra could not afford to lose the balance of the dowry she still owed Marco.

There is no evidence that she indulged herself in any luxuries in her frugal existence, and she did not mention the generous wedding feast provided by Marco Parenti for his marriage with Caterina although she did certainly appreciate Marco's generosity in the marriage settlement. A very human vignette reveals a different side of her nature when

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she complained tartly of the plums sent her by Filippo when she was ill, telling him that the cost of cartage and duty for bitter fruit was not justified. She was no martyr and her apparently spartan existence did not prevent her enjoyment of luxuries once her sons were able to afford them.

Alessandra Strozzi spent her life in unswerving devotion to ensuring the best possible lives for her children. She was also a woman whose ability to cope with the exigencies of her life show the strength of character which enabled her to persevere despite the setbacks she endured. Hard as her early life had been, she faced further difficulties when her three sons finally came under the sentence of exile, and then, only a few months later, the youngest died.

Her letters show no absolute dependence on religious observance, although she almost certainly attended her parish church, Santa Maria degli Ughi. There is just one reference to going to Mass at the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, and she prayed for her sons at a convent known as Le Murate where she asked the Mother Superior to say prayers for Niccolo Soderini on her behalf. She wrote to Filippo of her expenditure when having prayers said on All Souls' Day in 1465 for those of her family who had died, and gently reproved her wealthy son that this had not been possible before then.

Her appreciation of beauty is revealed in her lyrical description of Caterina's trousseau and again in her delight at the thought of the jewels and fabrics which Filippo would buy for his chosen wife. There is no evidence that Filippo ever sent any gift of beauty for his mother. The Flemish tapestries from Lorenzo gave her much pleasure, although she said that if she could get a good price she would sell them, clearly torn between duty and
pleasure. Her enjoyment of beauty certainly did not extend to her own garments consisting of the simple black garments of coarse fabrics which were distributed after her death. There was no jewellery among her belongings when she died. The final irony of Alessandra Strozzi’s life was the beautiful white damask altar cloth, embroidered in gold given to the parish church of Santa Maria Ughi in her memory.

Alessandra’s great strength of character and indomitable spirit enabled her to imbue her sons with the determination and perseverance which was necessary to ensure their ultimate success. Long absence from their native city did not prevent Alessandra Strozzi’s sons remaining dedicated to their ambition, and hers, to achieve full restoration of their political rights. Her letters illustrate her powerful influence on the direction of the lives and characters of her sons.

The correspondence is significant as the means by which she maintained a family relationship with her sons and all three continued to show their strong filial feelings for their mother despite minimal personal contact. The wealth of detail in which Alessandra wrote helps to confirm this.

Alessandra’s letters show her gradual recognition and acceptance of her eldest son’s increasing maturity, wealth and importance, and his progress can be followed in the letters from the obstinate boy to his assumption of his rightful role as head of the family and his ultimate achievement in becoming one of the wealthiest men in Europe. They also illustrate the significant role which Alessandra played in his ambitious drive for wealth and prestige.

The letters also show that Alessandra’s relationship with her younger sons, Lorenzo and Matteo, was quite different from that with her
eldest son. Lorenzo’s appealing personality but rather rebellious nature caused difficulties and she was eventually able to accept his maturity. There was no ambivalence in her uncomplicated maternal affection for Matteo.

The collection of seventy-three letters written by Alessandra Strozzi to her sons in exile maintained a link for them with their own society during their absence. Her unwavering persistence in pursuing the goals she had set was finally rewarded by the return of her sons to Florence as successful merchant bankers.

This study of the letters has been able to elucidate that although Alessandra was unable to achieve the perfect equality in education postulated by Burckhardt, her liability to be taxed seems to be have been perfectly equal with that of men, and she was equally able to carry out her responsibilities as head of her household, and managing her estate and business.

Her letters form a vital part of those writings of Florentine women which have proved to be particularly valuable in assessing the contribution that a woman was able to make to the society of which they formed a vital part.

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2J Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Italian Renaissance, London, 1932, p203. Burckhardt claims that the humanists advocated the availability of education for all and it was this tenet of humanism which was undoubtedly responsible for his euphemistic statement, oft-quoted, that 'women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men'.

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PART II
INTRODUCTION TO LETTER TRANSLATIONS

The following letters were written by Alessandra Strozzi to her sons, Filippo and Lorenzo who were in exile in Naples, between September 15, 1464 and February 5, 1465 inclusive, and were selected to provide a comprehensive view of Alessandra Strozzi understanding of Florentine life.

The first six letters in this selection, were written in the six months immediately following the death of Cosimo de' Medici in August 1464. These letters convey more intimately than any secondary material, just how this momentous event affected the lives of the citizens of Florence. They also show very clearly the development of the political manoeuvring which ensued, following the death of Cosimo de' Medici, and just how closely Alessandra was able to observe and understand the machinations and effects.

The financial uncertainty which was concomitant with the political insecurity was also described very vividly. The power of the regime of Cosimo de' Medici could not be automatically inherited by his son, Piero under the Florentine constitution. Piero was ultimately able to assume the mantle of Cosimo, although many of the principal citizens who included Luca Pitti, Dietisalvi Nerone and Agnolo Acciaiuolo were no longer supporting him.

The second group of ten letters were selected to support the argument that Alessandra Strozzi followed closely and understood the swiftly moving events of the reform of the electoral processes between November 1465 and February 1466. This group of letters also conveys the close attention which Alessandra Strozzi paid to the serious matter of finding wives for her sons, and the process by which
success was achieved in this.

Attempts to alter the method of election which had been manipulated by the Medicean regime so that no additional names had been entered in the purses for many years, ensured that those elected were supporters of the regime, and previous Gonfaloniers, their sons, brothers and nephews contributed the majority which provided the continuity on which the regime depended. When free elections were restored, most of those in power remained Medicean supporters, and Alessandra Strozzi's description of these troublous events provides an interesting although undoubtedly subjective commentary.

In translating these letters it has been decided to retain the colloquial forms of language used by Alessandra as closely as possible with the intention of retaining the original feeling of the letters, much of which would be lost if the translation were to be rendered in the current idiom of twentieth-century English. It has been borne in mind throughout that these letters were written to keep two business men, Alessandra Strozzi's sons, abreast of current affairs and financial matters in Florence. Naples, their home-in-exile, was two weeks travel distant from Florence. These letters were also a means of maintaining their affective bonding with their mother and family, and were never intended to be read as literary or historical contributions to knowledge of Florentine society for future generations. An attempt has been made to have the narrative flow as freely as possible within these constraints.

The original editor, Cesare Guasti, made changes in the text in correcting Alessandra's Quattrocento spelling and punctuation which contributed somewhat to loss of the original feeling of the letters, although probably clarifying the
meaning. Guasti was the Superintendent of the State Archives of Florence, and the bias and cultural attitudes of a nineteenth century Italian male must also be taken into account.

The modern calendar has been used throughout the translations and all dates have been revised in accordance with this.

One of the major problems encountered arose in trying to decipher the code used to maintain secrecy and to preserve the anonymity of citizens from possible unwelcome readers of the letters. To ensure as free a flow of the text as possible for readers, I have inserted the names, where known, in the text and included the numbers in brackets or as footnotes. The original editor, Cesare Guasti, was able to provide the identity of many of the people involved but there were several ciphers which remained unknown to Guasti, and also to later researchers. The issue is further confused as the codes were changed from time to time. Where reference to the context and further research was of no assistance in identification, the cipher has had to be left in the text. Mark Phillips, in The Memoir, had similar problems with the code used by Marco Parenti, which unfortunately was not the same as Alessandra’s. Phillips claims that the numbers were allocated arbitrarily and that he has been able to reconstruct only about half of the ciphers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The assistance of Associate Professor Nerida Newbigin of the Italian Department of the University of Sydney is gratefully acknowledged. She read and corrected these translations, and made many invaluable suggestions from her vast knowledge of the period. However the final work is my own and I accept the responsibility for the decision to present the translations in this form and for any errors thus engendered.
APPENDIX

Appended is a list of code numbers and the names they probably represent:

Marco Parenti, (Alessandra’s son-in-law)  13
Giovanni Bonsi, (Alessandra’s other son-in-law)  14
m. Otto Niccolini  17
Niccolo Soderini, (Gonfalonier of Justice)  18
Medicean supporters  30
Piero di Cosimo de’ Medici  32
Marriage  33
Lorenzo (Alessandra’s second son)  45
Agnolo Acciaiuolo (a principal citizen)  46
King of Naples and Exiles  50
Filippo Strozzi, (Alessandra’s elder son)  47
Return from exile  51
Giovanfrancesco di m. Palla Strozzi  53
Luca Pitti (54)
also (57)
Antonio Pucci  56
Dietisalvi di Nerone Dietisalvi  58
Fiammetta Adimari  59
Caterina Tanagli  60
Amount of Dowry  61
Dowry  63
LETTER TRANSLATIONS

LETTER 36.
To Filippo Strozzi in Castellammare.
In the name of God. 15th September 1464 s.c.
(Received 26th September).

My last letter was sent on 2nd, carried by Iacopo d'Ariano when he went there to the Salerno market; and with him I sent some fennel and twelve shirts, six for you and six for Lorenzo. Let me know when they arrive, and what has been done with them.

I had two letters from you two days ago; one of 14th of last month and the other 31st last and I reply to them as necessary. There is no doubt that a good many of the citizens have not made up their minds about the government of the city, following the death that has occurred, although one hears nothing yet because the matter is recent and Dietisalvi has been ill.¹ One hears nothing else except that people are expecting to rejoice; and your affairs or those of anyone who may be in your position, are not discussed, so it is well not to write to anyone of the matter.² So it is not necessary that I should stay in Florence on this account. I would not want to catch the plague of which there have been a good twenty cases per day; I

¹Cosimo de' Medici had died on August 1st, 1464. Dietisalvi here referred to is Dietisalvi di Nerone, one of the three cittadini principali of whom Alessandra and others had hoped might prevent Piero di Cosimo taking over his father's power in Florence. His illness prevented him taking any active role at this time. See N Rubinstein, The Government of Florence under the Medici: 1434 to 1494 Oxford, 1966, p140.

²The matter of the return of the exiles.
hear little reference to the other matter and nothing has been spoken of it. The citizens are in the country because of the plague so one does not hear much but after Ognissanti (All Saints’ Day) one may hear something. And when anything is heard it will undoubtedly be discussed where and with whom it will be necessary. One will not fail, neither for money nor for effort, to use friends and relatives, and nothing will be left undone. But one waits to hear what our man says for some justification and indication of the thinking of those in government. As I told you, Dietisalvi has been ill and Bernardetto (de’ Medici) is not to be taken too much account of, according to what I hear. And your messer A.(Acciaiuolo), however, is not where you would believe for I think him to be well disposed towards you, but according to what I hear, he is not yet the principal one.\(^3\) I hear nothing new of offices or orders, except for a fine Priorate, sworn in on the first of this month and before coming to office, the least-known person is Giovanni d’Anton di Salvestro, the Gonfalonier of Justice. Among those elected to the Signori there are several mature men who have previously been Gonfaloniers of Justice and I do not know anything else. I told Giovanni to write to you something about this, if he knew anything else. I would recommend again that you write a few lines to Tommaso Davizzi, who is in a position to be heard, to commend yourself to him. I will also do so when necessary, and at this end it will be no problem for me to advise you when I see the need. I have not written to you often in the last two months because nothing has happened of

\(^3\)Messer Agnolo Acciaiuolo was another of the principal citizens, together with Luca Pitti and Dietisalvi Nerone, who were apparently known to be in favour of the restoration of electoral controls. See Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence*, p140.
importance. I considered that you would hear of Cosimo's death more quickly than from me, and therefore I have not written of it. And I think your position is better rather than worse and there is no need to write of it to anyone now. When it is time you will be told.  

I see that messer Agnolo has been granted a title in the Kingdom of Naples. I hear that he will arrive there soon and from him you will hear how things are going here. I understand that if he accepts the title, he will be deprived of position here, because that is the custom here as was done in the time of the Grand Seneschal of the Acciaiuoli.

I will try to send you some marzolino cheese and several bunches of fennel in seed with Bernardo Bonsi's galley. His father is ill and it is feared that he will die; I do not know if this would stop the galley. Francesco Bonsi, Giovanni's brother, has also been ill and he has been here for two days. Messer Piero de' Pazzi died and it is said that his death was due to his own excesses. Niccolo Giugni is also ill and his life is in peril, but he would not be much loss.

Tell Lorenzo that I received his letter of 14th August on 6th (September), with two others: one for Luigi Pitti, the other for Zanobi Biliotti, which I  

4Other than the death of Cosimo de' Medici!

5That is, hope for recall from exile.

6Bernardo Bonsi is a relative of Giovanni Bonsi, Alessandra's son-in-law.

7The Pazzi were among Medicean supporters at this time.

8Three Giugni are listed by Dale Kent among the Medici friends and partisans in The Rise of the Medici, Appendix I, p353.
have given them.\footnote{Luigi Pitti was a member of Medicean faction and the Biliotti are also listed by Dale Kent as friends of the Medici, \textit{The Rise of the Medici}, Oxford University Press, Appendix I, p353.} No other reply is necessary: nor is there more for now. May God keep you from ill.

I am pleased that you are healthy and cheerful and I wish that God may keep you thus for a long time. Pay attention to remaining healthy, because with time your matters may be arranged.

Anton di Puccio is almost cured.\footnote{The Pucci were also significant members of Medicean faction.} He was very frightened, and he has given much money in alms for God. He has had prisoners released from the Stinche by paying fines and he has done much to give thanks for his cure. From your Alessandra Strozzi, at Selvi.
LETTER 37
To Filippo Strozzi in Naples.
In the name of God. 13th December 1464 s.c.
(Received 29th December).

I sent my last letter on 30th of last month (November), and it was taken by Perantonio Buondelmonti. I have had two of yours since, one dated 20th (November) from Capova, and the other dated 2nd of this month. Here is a brief reply because Tommaso will supply details by mouth when he carries this.1 Girolamo di Lotto Lotti goes with him, as you will see, and I believe that you will be well served by him. He is experienced and without any vice; he does not gamble or anything. He tells me that I should advise you that if he should err in any way in carrying out his duties when he arrives there, you should correct him as if he were your brother. And make Giovacchino take the responsibility for showing him what is needed.

Messer Simone, Bettino's brother, has been elected rector of the church of Santuccio: at last! And he made it ahead of many who believe that they should have had it before him. You will hear from Tommaso, if he remembers, because he will have so many things to tell you that he would need to have the skill of a good memory.

I understand from your letter of 2nd (December) that you would need permission to be able to come here for a month on matters of business, and of honour; for me it would be a great consolation. And because I was not feeling very well a while ago with my illness and was not going outside, I conferred

1This Tommaso is probably Tommaso Ginori, Alessandra's most favoured courier.
about it with Giovanni and Marco. They believe that I should make an effort to ask the advice of messer Agnolo, rather than Dietisalvi, believing that I would hear from him what I wanted to hear.\(^3\)

In the end he told me that he wanted to speak about it to other citizens and that by the day after next he would answer me. And indeed I had not expected such a reply but one cannot know their business and their minds. I thought that he was speaking favourably and would be able to give me a more truthful reply about it. He knows Dietisalvi well and we thought that messer Agnolo wished to confer with him about it. Because Dietisalvi is one of your friends, it seems to us, (that is to me, to Giovanni and to Marco), that we should also ask his advice. As he is a very good friend of Marco, he went to him and the reply was, as you will hear from Tommaso, that these Priors who are at present in office cannot be spoken to. Others will be drawn when the term of this Signoria expires, and messer Agnolo controls the electoral purses this time and even the leading citizens believe that things will happen.\(^4\) Many evils are being revealed and they may have to draw the Eight again.\(^5\) So that Dietisalvi thinks that we should wait and see this time. If the Signoria is chosen their way, you will be told

\(^2\)Giovanni Bonsi and Marco Parenti are Alessandra’s sons-in-law.

\(^3\)These leading citizens are referred to in the previous letter as among the Accoppiatori in office for the two-monthly elections. See Rubinstein, Government, pp 141-2.

\(^4\)Agnolo said that the Accoppiatori who controlled the ballot bags had put back the names of most of the citizens who had been eligible under the Medici regime.

\(^5\)Otto di Guardia - Council responsible for exiles.
to whom the King should write, first to the Signoria and then to the citizens. And this is the advice of Dietisalvi. Since the request of the King is legitimate and honourable, and in his interests, I am hopeful that if he writes and asks cordially, everything will turn out well. May God arrange everything for the best.

Here there are great setbacks with people going bankrupt and others who are in danger of failure. The evils which they have been hatching for a while, damage all exiles. Perhaps it will recover and may God be pleased to provide our needs. And I remind you to manage your affairs carefully, because I know it takes little effort to lose what one has acquired over a long time. You will have heard from Tommaso and you will be informed of what has happened up to today.

The 14th (December) today, and Tommaso tells me that messer Agnolo has told him that I should not ask for a reply, as he has given it to Tommaso. He has spoken with messer Luca and Dietisalvi and they are in agreement. They only have doubts about Piero de' Medici and it is necessary to get the King to write to him, and get him to write to messer Luca, messer Agnolo and to Dietisalvi and to the others, as messer Agnolo is to advise you. You must write to your other friends also, and Lorenzo could write to Bonaccorso and to Luigi Pitti and to Tommaso Davizzi and also the four principal ones above. We certainly believe that if the King writes in good spirit, you will be pardoned through his intervention. The King is today held in high esteem by Piero di Cosimo de' Medici and by the other leading citizens. It is important that your arguments be presented with great sincerity, because

6The King of Naples appealed to the principal citizens on behalf of the Strozzi.
I have never heard of it succeeding in fifty previous such matters. I will make an appeal to God, for if it is to turn out for the best, he may give me the consolation of health of mind and body. I say nothing else now and I expect soon to tell you my news in person. Offer thanks to God, and may he keep you from evil. From your Alessandra, Florence.
LETTER 38
To Filippo Strozzi in Naples.
In the name of God. 29th December 1464 s.c.
(Received 15th January 1465 s.c.)
I wrote to you on 22nd, sent by the hand of Carlo and then on 23rd I sent you a few lines by the carrier, Francesco di Giano; and although it may arrive slowly, I am pleased that he is doing us a favour. Since then I have yours of 11th of this month which needs little reply. It is more that you should have news of us than anything else.
I see Lorenzo was at Gaeta and by now he should have returned and have had my reply to his letter of 6th. As I told you in a previous letter, I did not want to give his letter to Luigi. Having done all I could for you, I have not spoken since to anyone else. Having to act on behalf of one of you, I would rather do it for you. I am considering bigger fish than Luigi, and anyway Luigi was to ask those to whom he had spoken again.¹ From an earlier letter you will have understood that it would be well to write to Luigi and to other friends, so that God may allow the best to ensue. And, as you say, all it can bring you, both here and there, is great honour and profit.
Ambassadors for there have not yet been chosen, as you have been told, because there have been so many bankruptcies that the citizens have been very busy with other things. The worst was our Giovan Francesco, because if I had a few thousand from you

¹In a footnote to this letter Guasti (ed) wrote that Alessandra had two reasons for not giving Lorenzo’s letter to Luigi Pitti. Firstly, it was Filippo for whom permission to return to Florence had been requested and not Lorenzo. Secondly, it was necessary to obtain the goodwill of more powerful citizens than Luigi Pitti.
exiles, I could not have invested it more securely, apart from with you. And you see what happened to him?2 I hear that Niccolo Strozzi has been involved and I was concerned. Carlo3 tells me that you are not (involved), and it seems to me you have been fortunate not to be implicated with anyone who has failed. May God be thanked.

The (church of) Santuccio is in confusion, as you say, and I am afraid that Niccolò Baldovini will end up there, appointed by the Pope. When Francesco Strozzi took it from messer Zaccheria, he gave it to one ser Adamo but he did not complete the necessary documents when Francesco wanted it to go to the said messer Zaccheria.4 So having first deprived him of it, it was not returned to him, as master. An agreement was made with him, so that neither the one nor the other holds it with proper title of patron. The church has been without patrons for four months since the priest vacated it. It is more than four years since Francesco did this, and consequently they say that the church without priests has reverted to the Pope. And this Baldovini is a secular priest and is causing quarrels among many of the religious. When messer Piero da Iesi heard of the sudden death of messer Zaccheria, it was he who had drawn up all the documents between Francesco and

2Giovanfrancesco Strozzi was a fourth cousin of Matteo di Simone, Alessandra’s husband, and a son of Matteo’s former neighbour and good friend, messer Palla di Nofri Strozzi. Alessandra herself would not have known anyone more trustworthy than Giovanfrancesco, to whom she could entrust her money.

3Carlo was mentioned earlier in this letter and is probably the son of Donato Cavalcanti.

4See Guasti, p340 for the Strozzi patronage of this church, San Giovambatista, in the parish of Brozzi. A similar situation had arisen in 1447, to which Alessandra referred.
messer Zaccheria and ser Adamo. He told them that there was no priest and the said Niccolò Baldovini asked the Pope for it. When he arrived to assume his tenure, he found Pandolfini there. This fellow is not legitimate, and is the brother of Apollonio, a relative of Marco.\(^5\) Lorenzo knows him, for he used to be in the Mugello. It seems that he is inflexible, and has not entered the home of his father or of his brother for many years. All he does is sue the priests and the brothers and he has great friends at the Court.\(^6\) So that I do not know what is to happen to the poor church, and Pandolfini is suing messer Simone for it. May God help its affairs, so that they may not conclude badly.

I hear that \(^5\) \(^2\) \(^7\) has made his will and left everything to his nephew and one of your friends is executor of the will. You are advised, if you did not know it.

I have had one of your letters written on 11th to Tommaso. Because the said Tommaso has arrived there, I have not sent it back, because you will hear from him first hand. I will save everything for him until he returns.

Nothing has been done about the contract because Allesandra (Alessandra’s daughter) has not yet arrived in Florence and besides I will wait (to see) if Lorenzo comes here, and everything would be arranged properly.

Tommaso tells me that Niccolò di Filippo

\(^5\)Marco Parenti, Caterina Strozzi’s husband.

\(^6\)The Papal Court.

\(^7\)Unknown codename, but may possibly refer to Giovanfrancesco di messer Palla, whose brother Lorenzo had died some years earlier. Lorenzo’s widow, the other Alessandra Strozzi, had also died, leaving their daughter, Marietta, and her brother orphaned. Giovanfrancesco’s cipher later became 53.
Strozzi wanted to give you Lionardo who indeed needs someone to wake him up, but it seems to me it is better for him to stay with Niccolò than with anyone else. And I believe that his sojourn here has done him great harm, as he has forgotten more than he learned, except in gambling. He learned this and some other virtues, as you will have heard from Tommaso.

I have had two bolts of the silk sent by il Mugnaino, or rather by his young carrier; Giovanni Ginori has taken it out of bond and he will tell you everything. And we will do the same, if any more arrives in the name of Tommaso. Nothing else for this (letter). May God guard you from ill. From your Alessandra Strozzi, Florence.

Today the Signori have been drawn, and I know some of them: Gonfalonier is Tommaso della Rena; Zanobi Bonvanni and Carlo Gondi; Mariotto Rucellai, who has the farm at Campi: and one of the Giachi, and there is Francesco di Mainardo Cavalcanti, nephew of Donato. I do not know the other names, I believe they are people that I do not know.

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8Niccolò di Filippo Strozzi again refers to Filippo’s mentor and Lionardo is obviously one of Niccolò’s young nephews customarily taken in to learn his business.
LETTER 39

To Filippo Strozzi in Naples.
In the name of God. 3rd January 1465 s.c. (Received 18th January 1465 s.c.)

My last letter, dated 29th last (December), went with the letters of the Miraballi, as usual: since then I have had one from you of 18th last which I received on 30th. I reply as necessary.

The matter put to the Signoria seems very important to you, which indeed it is. Nobody who wishes to see the desired result achieved, as I do, thinks it to be so terrible, especially if they know your affairs. And from Tommaso, through letters from me and from others, you will hear everything. He and Girolamo di Lotto Lotti should have arrived there together a few days ago. May God have given them a good journey. I expect Tommaso to return here soon; may it please God with the good news that I want. And, as you were told in another letter, he did not give the letter to Luigi Pitti.

I see that you are upset about Lodovico's situation and you did well to offer him your help. They say that they will pay 20 soldi in the lira and that they will remain rich.¹ They have many houses, and, it is said, property and household goods to the value of 16,000 florins. Thus, in this case, they lose reputation more than anything else. And since then you will have heard about Giovanfrancesco di messer Palla; he is another adornment to our family.² He has many debts with us and some say that he will do his duty, and some say not. I

¹The debt would be paid in full.

²This 'adornment' is Alessandra's irony, for a bankrupt in the family was a disaster, especially for the already disadvantaged exiles.
believe that his niece will be much harmed by this. One hears no talk of the people we talked about in the past, but we shall have to see in a few months time. The matter of these bankruptcies seems to be settled for now and I have heard of no others since Giovanfrancesco. They have had holidays all this month, and I do not know why, but I believe it to be good for those in debt.

Concerning your matter, you have taken a different way from the one I told you, which seems to me worthy and honourable. I am pleased the King should be so generous to you, as I hear that he is. And about the gift that I wrote I wished you to make to Messere, I have been dissuaded by Giovanni Bonsi and Marco Parenti. They say that I would waste it, because the deeds do not measure up to the words and therefore I have given up the idea and it will not arrive there. If I hear that anyone else is going there, you will be informed.

You must know that because of what has happened, with falling interest rates, the money in the Monte is reduced and if you send the power of attorney, I will hold on to it. If I have to use it, I shall use it when there is the opportunity to reinvest it in something safe and solid for her, otherwise, no.

With regard to Niccolò Strozzi’s affairs, I am glad they are more lies than truth, and the person

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3 Marietta, daughter of Alessandra de’ Bardi di Lorenzo di messer Palla Strozzi, suffered already by the death of her parents. The bankruptcy of her uncle was damaging to the honour to the entire lineage. Alessandra’s son, Lorenzo, had hoped to marry Marietta but his brother Filippo vetoed this match because of the bankruptcy.

4 This probably refers to Alessandra’s dowry, invested in the Monte delle Doti, which Alessandra was looking after.
who started this rumour does no good.  

Concerning Santuccio I am not pleased and I have written to Niccolò about this. May God and St. John the Baptist, for whom it is named, give it to the priest who will least waste it.

I believe that with regard to a wife, we have to wait and see. In the name of God so be it for I still want to see what is to become of your affairs. Then I will put before you a girl from Vernia, if she has the qualities we are looking for. I will find out and if we like her, we could discuss her. Carlo Baroncelli has (married) the other sister. Advise us if you like the idea, because it would please me, seeing that she is beautiful and well mannered.

I have asked Niccolò Ardinghelli’s mother about him but they have had no letters from him since March and they are very worried. The other was in Venice for this matter of Giovanfrancesco, who is in Ferrara. As you say, Tommaso may not be very successful since Giovanfrancesco’s bankruptcy. Although it is thought that they will pay, they will not receive as much as they would like from him; and it is thought that the other one in the East has not done very well either. May God help them and those who need it.

I have heard nothing of the proposed marriage

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5See previous letter in which Alessandra reported that she had heard that Niccolò had been involved in the bankruptcies.

6In fact, Alessandra had already seen and approved Fiammetta Adimari’s appearance. The dowry would have to be discussed if her family were willing to have her marry an exile.

7This is somewhat obscure although Giovanfrancesco di messer Palla had strategically left Florence for Ferrara. The connection with Niccolò Ardinghelli, other than parentado, is unclear. They may have been business partners.
alliance between (a daughter of) Acciaiuolo (46) with the son of Luca Pitti (54), nor of her arrival there. It does not seem to me the right time to leave here now. If I hear anything else, I will advise you.

I had a letter on 30th last, dated 22nd, from Niccolò Strozzi, in which he tells me that I should tell Piero and Tommaso Capponi that since he did not wish to reinvest the money left with them by the said Filippo Strozzi. So they should pay it to me and if I took it, I should write them a letter of receipt, but being a holiday, I could not. But the next day, which was 2nd, I sent Marco Parenti there because Giovanni Bonsi was not in Florence, and he showed the letter to Lionardo.8 Lionardo replied that he had had a letter from Niccolò Strozzi, of the same date as mine, which said that he did not wish to invest the money and they should give it to me. Consequently, when a messenger came from Venice who was leaving for Rome early in the morning in order to be there quickly, he remitted 500 florins to Rome to Niccolò, by the hand of Giovanni Borromei and the money seems safe. If he had had the advice from Niccolò, he would have given it to me because the money is not being sent back to them. Apart from the Medici and the Borromei,9 he would not know where to invest the money. The 350 florins had been advanced by Filippo and letters are awaited by this messenger, who will do as he is advised.

It is now 5th January and I have heard the reason why they have had the holidays. And it is this: there are some people who are on the verge of

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8This Lionardo may be the Lionardo referred to in the previous letter whom Alessandra recommended should stay with Niccolò Strozzi. He is almost certainly Niccolò's nephew.

9Banking firms of these names.
failing financially with the others. The Pazzi are
trembling on the edge of bankruptcy and it is said
that the Baroncelli have gone and there are some
others here but they have kept quiet during the
holidays. ¹⁰ May God provide what is needed.

Regarding Giovanfrancesco's land, it is said
again that he does not seem to want to do what he
must. If he does not do it, being declared a rebel,
perhaps death will follow as punishment. I hear
that he will not be able to stay in Venice or
Ferrara, because of the pacts they have with the
Commune here. And his niece, Marietta, has taken a
great step down, so perhaps they could be persuaded
to give her to Lorenzo. ¹¹ May God allow the best to
follow.

It is several months since that pork-butcher in
Borgo San Lorenzo reminded me of the nine florins
owed by your father. I believe that you have heard
of it previously, especially from Lorenzo, who spoke
to him when he (Lorenzo) was here sick. I have put
him off as much as possible, saying that I do not
have to pay the debts of your father. And in the
end, seeing he could not get the money any other
way, he has served a writ for excommunication
against us. In the belief that this would bring us
harm and shame I have had him speak to our priest, a
good and able man. He has secured a month's grace
for us, telling him that I will write and advise you

¹⁰ Holidays prevented access to the tribunal and
were therefore advantageous to those on the brink of
bankruptcy.

¹¹ See footnote above regarding Marietta. Alesandsa thought that Marietta's family might be
prepared to accept Lorenzo, an exile, in marriage,
while Filippo's argument was that Lorenzo could not
afford any closer link with the bankrupt
Giovanfrancesco. Marietta's 'step down' refers to
her increasing ineligibility, already an orphan, for
honourable marriage.
of this matter. I will await your reply and what will follow. He has in writing from a notary that Matteo was contracted to give him this money through Agnolo da Vergereto, the horse-dealer; so that Matteo was his debtor. Reply what it is to be done. As for me I cannot do more with him, nor put him off with more words. I find that Matteo owed 20 florins to this Agnolo on this account in his Book. You and I will bear the burden of this matter of excommunication as well as Matteo. If we were excommunicated, I would never believe that I could do anything to conclude it satisfactorily. Let me know your thoughts.

Antonio di Soldo Strozzi arrived four days ago and he says he has brought me some barrel or other which is still in Pisa. You do well to send me some of them, as you are leaving me short of barrels and oilcloth bags. I argue all the time with Cateruccia (my slave) who says she cannot save a single bag.

This letter is written with my spectacles: you can read it again, more than once, it is so easy to understand properly.

In another letter, I told you about Tommaso's letters that I had withheld, and all those inside them. I will save them all until his return. It is 5 o'clock, and the messenger from Rome, for whom one has waited three days, is still not here.\footnote{The twenty-four hour clock began at sunset and '23 hours' refers to one hour before sunset.} I am taking it easy because the cold troubles me when I am writing and I will wait to seal this letter when the messenger arrives. In yours of 18th December you say you are writing to Tommaso what he has to do about the matter of the money. I do not find his letter to be here and I think Niccoli will have kept it in Rome, having arrived there. And it is true that there has been great financial ruin here. Now
matters are improving, probably because of the holidays, although the cause remains. No more for now. May God keep you from ill. From your Alessandra, in Florence.

\begin{footnote}{Alessandra is aware that Piero di Cosimo Medici's fiscal policies have been responsible for a number of bankruptcies.}\end{footnote}
LETTER 40

To Filippo and Lorenzo Strozzi in Naples.

In the name of God. 12th January 1465 s.c.
(Received 24th January 1465 s.c.)

My last was sent on 5th January: since then I have had yours of 22nd last (December) in which there is little to answer. However, I write so that you have a reason to write to me, and so that you can hear our news. Our household is well, and I remain like all elderly women whose chests are always rattling. It is a great consolation to hear that you are healthy, and doing well. May God long keep you well in spirit and body, as I would wish.

The proxy was in your letter which I had on 6th of this month and you can be sure that if Lessandra’s Monte share is to be sold, I will take great care to re-invest in something solid and secure for her. For now, one would not withdraw it, because the Monte has fallen, and is at 27.5 per cent. Giovanni Bonsi tells me he does not want to withdraw it until it is at 30 per cent, so for now there will be no change.

I sent the letter to Lodovico and his affair is causing great regret, as they have not taken this step foolishly. You have done well to support him. I hear that they will return 20 soldi in the lira of the debt they have to repay here, and that is very likely true: and they have left, between houses, possessions and furnishings, 16,000 florins. It remains now to see what debt they have in the west

1The bankruptcy of Lodovico was mentioned in the previous letter of 3rd January. He is the nephew of Antonio di Benedetto Strozzi who advised Alessandra when she returned to Florence.
and they will be rich or poor on the basis of that. May God help them, as they have lost their honour henceforward. And since then there has been this other blow of Giovanfrancesco, which has caused great harm to the Strozzi family: and he is the one who is blamed and if he does not do what he can for his creditors, he will be shamed and dishonoured, and the family will feel it also; stains that will last for ever. May God provide for the needs of everyone.

I am awaiting the reply to those letters carried by Tommaso Ginori. I will be pleased if you have done what we wanted and every day I wait for something good to come of it. We will see what follows. May God, who knows our need, ensure the best follows. Here they are waiting for creditors to be reconciled, and to impose taxes. Between that for grain for the Abbondanza and for the Monte, and the denaro in the lira imposed for all this, and another quarter catasto to Santo Spirito, it will be a miracle if the money is paid! There being no unusual expenses, I believe everything ends up in the rich purses. May God provide for this poor city.

In your letter, you tell me to return Tommaso's letter with the contract, so I return it with this. I heard from Lionardo Mannegli that he sent the remainder back to Rome with the messenger on his way to Niccolò Strozzi in Rome, by the Medici bank and you should have been advised of it.

Giovanni Bonsi tells me that Donato Cavalcanti told him that Lodovico and Batista are turning to

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2 The west possibly refers to Naples and the extent of the debt there will dictate their future wealth or otherwise.

3 'Unusual expenses' refers particularly to those associated with wars.
him for what they are owed by his son, Carlo. Carlo is not emancipated so his father is obliged to pay. I am sorry (about this) for the love of two grown daughters living at home, one of whom must be more than twenty. God help them. I do not know anything else to tell you. May God keep you from ill. From your Alessandra Strozzi in Florence.

I have not yet received the barrel you sent me by Antonio di Soldo Strozzi because the weather has been very unpleasant here with snow and wind. It has snowed here for nine days, so that from Christmas night until 2nd of this month, one could not walk outside. If it has been the same there, Tommaso and Girolamo will hear of it any day.

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4Lodovico and Batista are probably the sons of Francesco di Benedetto Strozzi, nephews of Antonio. Lodovico has been mentioned in earlier letters.

5The twenty-year-old daughter is well past marriageable age.

6Soldo Strozzi was initially chosen by Alessandra to escort her son, Matteo, to Naples in 1450, but he died before he was able to do so.
LETTER 41

To Filippo Strozzi in Naples.

In the name of God. 26th January 1465 s.c.

(Received 8th February 1465 s.c.)

My last letter went on 12th of this month and since then I have had two of yours, of 1st and 11th inst. I have not replied to the first, which I received on the evening of 12th. As soon as I had written to you, I developed a fever with swelling of the whole head and down below my ears and I remained like that for several days. Since then, by the grace of God, I am free of it. And this was the reason for not answering your letter: I will do so briefly in this.

You were told in an earlier letter that the power of attorney had been received, but as the Monte has fallen, Giovanni Bonsi does not wish to do anything about it. And when anything is decided, everything will be done to safeguard Lesandra.¹

Concerning the letters you wrote to Tommaso, I kept the ones that have come into my hands, with the exception of the one which you wrote asking me to send back if Tommaso was not there, and I sent it with mine, I believe, of 12th of this month.

I hear nothing of Lodovico Strozzi that I have not already told you in a previous letter. They say that anybody who owes anything is going bankrupt and during the holidays, one cannot see what is happening; particularly me because this way I do not hear everything. I have heard only of Lorenzo Larioni, who has put himself in the hands of Piero

¹Continued references to taking care of Lesandra’s dowry are probably explained by the lack of skill by Giovanni Bonsi in managing his affairs.
de' Medici, with whom he has reached agreement. It is said that he will be richer than he was ten years before he became involved in business. So that he will be better off materially, if not in honour. I hear that he will repay only a few soldi in the lira: the damage is to those who lost everything. I believe it will be the same for Giovanfrancesco's family. There are various opinions: those who say that his word is good and those who think his deeds will be bad. And Piero Canigiani, who went to see him, says he wishes to do his duty. Until he has news of his business from the east and the west he can say nothing. In the Pratica they considered that if he refused to do his duty, they could declare him a rebel, and fine him in arrears. You did well not to accept his letter, because you would have been involved with him. Niccolò, who plays so fair received a good sum. As you say, he would have to deal better with him than the others, out of respect for his relationship. May it please God that he do his duty, so that more inconvenience does not follow.

Of your business, I have heard only what you have told me; that Lorenzo has been to the King. It seems to me that neither with the letters nor without, should Lorenzo attempt to come here. It would ruin the major and important request for the sake of the small one. Having intended in the beginning to try to make the major request, I would

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2Nothing has been established about Lorenzo Larioni.

3Alessandra's half-sister Caterina married a Canigiani, so Piero is of her Macinghi parentado.

4Alessandra believes that the family should concentrate their efforts on the more important matter, that of the return of the exiles, and not distract anyone with minor items, such as permission for Lorenzo to visit Florence.
have discouraged you from this, for your sake and for Lorenzo's. They are not matters to be treated so lightly. If Tommaso arrives with letters and I see him before he hands them over to Piero, I will not allow him to give them to him, because that is not what you need. And it seems to me, according to what you write, that you know it and you will send Tommaso here without them. Again I tell you that if he does arrive with them, I will not let him give them. If it happens that you feel that Tommaso is not what you need for the King's business, entrust the commission to friends here, who will serve you well with what you need. Tommaso is good and faithful, but he is not as solid as he could be. If San Quirico was his idea, at the time I did not think so, but I can see you go into this carefully. The person most affected sees more than anyone else.

The mind of the son of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici (32), according to what I hear, is very affectionate to the King of Naples (47) up to today. If the friendship is maintained, I believe that Filippo will get what he wants: I say if the friendship is maintained, because these people change their mind often. As I told you in another letter, someone who was of good mind towards you had a good part in the government. Now I hear that Antonio Pucci has been added and everything he wants he gets, and he can do more than anyone, as I believe that he may come from Luca Pitti (54) and the son of Piero de' Medici (32). If your matter were approved, and one were writing on behalf of the King to these friends, and it seems appropriate to you, you could also write to him. I know that it would be degrading for the King to write to such a humble man.\textsuperscript{5} At present he has great power. It was

\textsuperscript{5}Antonio Pucci is referred to here, and Alessandra gave him the code-name of 56.
not so two months ago, and I am giving him a code name, so that I understand when there is more to say of him. You will have heard of the Signoria: the Gonfalonier is the father-in-law of Anton Pucci's sister. It is a Signoria which has to govern with the goodwill of those in power, and so they all do as they are ordered! And of that, nothing more needs to be said.

I am pleased that the money matter is being settled, and I commend your waiting to see how matters here concerning these merchants are proceeding. I told you in another letter that I have the silk at home and I have never had any money from the Capponi Bank. Lionardo Strozzi said that he had sent it to Rome to Niccolò Strozzi. It went partly by the hand of Borromei and the remainder by the hand of the Medici. He does not find he has any of your money, but he says he paid I do not know how many florins on your behalf to the person from Meleto, which he has to get back from you.

The matter of Niccolò Ardinghelli will take time: up till now I hear Luigi is in Venice. I hear nothing of Niccolò Ardinghelli, which is amazing since he had already arranged his marriage two years ago: either he is doing so well that he does not remember her, or he has done badly with his affairs.

You have paid back 24 florins to Zanobi di Dietisalvi's bank, which is good but in a few days I will need to pay other taxes; I will ask the bank for the money, and I will advise you of it. If the reputation of our family is lowered by my affairs, I have to live with it and tremble with fears of this false world! I praise God and give thanks for everything, and I commend your spirit and the prosperity which you know comes from God. I say

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6The Capponi, Borromei and Medici are all banks.

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prayers for you at the 'Murate' Convent and will continue to pray that God give us life, with health of mind and body, as I would wish.⁷ I am pleased that you are taking Lorenzo in with you, for I have no greater consolation than that you love each other, and help one another, with great affection for your affairs to remain better in the eyes of God and man. May God long support you. No more for now.

Lorenzo writes to me of some plums or other, which he had not sent on the first; and Antonio di Soldo told me that on 25th last he left there, and that you sent them by the galley in a barrel. He said that he had not seen it, but as he was returning to Pisa, he would send it with his other things. If the said barrel is not there he cannot send it to me. He has made a mistake and I expect it some other way, and I will appreciate them as they are a different quality from ours.

If you write to Bernadetto, I hear he seldom goes outside and I do not believe you should write to him on matters of importance. I expect Tommaso at any time now: may God bring him safely. When I see Lotto, or Lorenza, I will console her with the good wishes regarding Girolamo.⁸ Nothing else by this letter. God keep you from evil. From your Alessandra, Florence.

Your letters have not been touched.

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⁷This was a Benedictine convent.

⁸Girolamo di Lotto Lotti who went to Naples to work with Filippo.
To Filippo and Lorenzo Strozzi in Naples.

In the name of God. 22nd November 1465 (Received 6th December).

I wrote to you on the 16th and I told you what had happened until then: I have had nothing from you since. In this, I must tell you the opposite of what I told you then, that Niccolò Soderini (18) is a friend of Lorenzo (45), in respect of my affairs, and also in another letter I told you about a friend of the King of Naples (47). Since I wrote to you, I have heard something which makes me uneasy. I was hoping that this change would give effect to many good things for the city, but already it is said: 'Only for some'. Now, it is four days since the petition was put to the Popolo for the scrutiny, and was lost. It seems that the Gonfalonier is very worried and all the citizens are in great trouble, and are at daggers drawn. Piero di Cosimo de' Medici (32) is against Agnolo Acciaiuolo (46) and against the friend on the voting-paper which you sent me some time ago with your letter and nobody is too pleased with Luca Pitti (54); and Niccolò

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1 This is probably ironic, as Soderini is no friend to this Strozzi family and the irony may have been intended to mislead anyone illegally reading the letter.

2 Refers to the election of Niccolò Soderini as Gonfalonier for the two month term of November and December.

3 This is probably the proposal to 'complete the destruction of the system of electoral controls built up by the Mediceans:' Rubinstein, Government, p146. It was finally passed with narrow majorities by the end of November.
Soderini (18), more than anyone, blames 30\(^6\) and Antonio Pucci (56). They remain as bewildered as an ass in a hailstorm and 16\(^5\) is not very cheerful. Take account that there is more at stake than just five florins. And whereas the people believed they would be better off for this change, for several days they have been saying that it will be worse than before, because serious trouble is being uncovered and there is great confusion among 'maggiori' and 'minori' and everyone. May it be God's wish that this matter end well; it reminds me of '34.\(^6\) May God in his mercy make peace for all, because it is greatly needed. So that you see how quickly our hopes recede into the distance. And now when you and Lorenzo were favourably disposed to marriage (33) it may take a long time, as nothing can be decided about it because men have other matters to consider at present. Thus it is necessary to wait for the right time, and for spirits to be calm and shortly we should see what has to be.

You had letters from the Signoria that you may appoint the Consul there in your own way and now I hear that before this petition may be put to the test, the Gonfalonier has had discussions about reappointing that rogue Zanobi.\(^7\) I heard this when Pietro Pagolo came to visit me and I said to him that the Signoria had given approval for the Nation

\(^4\)This 30 is said to be 'un Mediceo' or perhaps the Medicean party.

\(^5\)The subject of the cipher 16 is not known.

\(^6\)The year 1434 in which the Medici were returned to power, leading to the exile of Alessandra's husband, Matteo di Simone Strozzi.

\(^7\)The rogue, Zanobi, is not identified but it seems that he may have been the Consul to the Nation in Naples, whom Lorenzo succeeded.
to make the Consul their own way. He replied to me that he had heard, but that then Giuliano Gondi said that he had spoken to the Gonfalonier about this Zanobi, and that he had gone to the Gonfalonier and commended the Nation and Filippo Strozzi to him. When he (Niccolò Soderini, the Gonfalonier) was reminded of Filippo, he became all agitated, and showed in his face that between you and him there was no friendship, which young Gondi (Gondino) says is the reason he withdrew. So that I do not know what is to happen. For the moment they have other things to think about but if things settled down, perhaps he will move against you. I believe that you will be told about it by Giuliano: and meanwhile as what had been said of Niccolò Soderini is now the opposite, because they have no stability! Nothing happens in response to these matters. Advise how you find it.

It is the 23rd November, and today they have re-formed the Council, and they are in session; I do not know what will happen. If the reform proposal is not passed, the matters that follow will displease some. Nothing else is happening here now. May God keep you from ill. From your Alessandra Strozzi, in Florence.

When I was about to seal this I had your letter, Filippo, of the 14th November carried by Giovanni di ser Francesco. Brief reply, as it is late. Regarding the Consulship, you have one cold

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8 The 'Nation' is a union of Florentine commercial enterprises in Naples. Alessandra met Pietro Pagolo at the Convent of the Murate and she learned that he was a cousin of Matteo di Simone.

9 The Gondi family were anti-Medicean in 1434, and were among the families returned to favour between 1458 and 1465.

10 The earlier favourable opinion of Soderini had changed.
and one hot.¹¹ I am writing to you by every messenger of what I hear during the week. They are making great changes and one week they talk of doing one thing and the next they talk of the opposite. And someone else would also wish to advise you of the things that they say are going to happen and he thinks that nothing can be achieved here. I believe that in order to do well, it will be necessary to eliminate this evil: so that in respect of the return of the exiles (51) and of marriage (33) we need to go slowly. I do not know what will become of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici (32), who argues most strangely with the father of 49,¹² and many old injuries are remembered. It is said that Antonio Pucci (56) is ill and is expected to get worse. They are enemies of Soderini (18). I have heard nothing of Marietta and there is nothing else to do. Nothing else of importance is happening in your matter. If Giovanni di ser Francesco comes here, I will welcome him warmly for love of you. If anything else happens, I will advise you by every carrier, if it pleases God.

¹¹One vote in favour and one vote against approval of the Consulship for Lorenzo.

¹²Subject of cipher 49 is unknown.
LETTER 61

To Filippo and Lorenzo Strozzi in Naples.
In the name of God. 19th December 1465 (Received 4th January).

My last went on 7th and I have had none from you since. I have little to tell you in this, I only write from habit.

I know I forgot to tell you in the last letter that Giovanni di ser Francesco came to see me and gave me good news of you and praised greatly the honour that you did him.¹ May God be praised! You do well to honour those who visit your home. May you be able to do it for a long time, for the good of your soul!

I advise you, that Marco Parenti (13) tells me that there is no further talk on the matter of marriage (33) neither for you nor for Lorenzo. When they do talk about it, you will be advised. On return from exile (51) for Lorenzo (45) and the others, there is silence now: the goodwill that Niccolò Soderini (18) had for the last month has turned to misfortune, especially for Antonio Pucci (58). Thus, even if Soderini (18) was willing to carry out the return of the exiles (51), it would not be followed through, so that he would not be given the glory for it. And Luca Pitt (57) has been exposed as speaking against Antonio Pucci (58).² I do not know what course these matters will take, because everyone is waiting for the scrutiny. May God wish it to go well and the city to remain at peace, or rather the men. While there is no peace

¹The identity of Giovanni di ser Francesco is not known.

²The code numbers may have been changed and 57 now used for Luca Pitti and 58 for Antonio Pucci.
between those who govern, I do not believe there can be any discussion about reinstating you or the others. A great war or a good peace is needed: may God grant it to us.

Last October, my sister Caterina’s son came here from Padua. He was a friar of the Badia of Florence and was living in the Order at Padua. He came to see his mother and remained here for 20 days. On the 3rd of last month he was to return there, but he decided to go to Rome first to see messer Francesco, who is with the Cardinal of Milan.\(^3\) It seems that he became ill with plague on the way, and he went on to Rome and he lived 17 days before he died; and messer Francesco had him looked after. Caterina has had this news and she does nothing but cry, and she is very grieved for this son. And now she has the news that in the house where he died, and was cared for, eight had died of the plague; and she is waiting all the time for news of messer Francesco, who also stayed there. So that you see how the poor woman is, and how sad she is. Just when she was waiting for the judgment in his favour to have the benefice restored, he is under the threat of death.\(^4\)

You will have heard of the death of Bernardetto, who died on the 15th: and to mona Gostanza and to his sons it seems to have been a great loss despite the condition he was in. He has been paid great public tribute.

I have taken on a worker at Pazzolatico who is to commence work in February. Because the farm is still in disorder and the weather is bad, I have extended myself to help him with a beast so that he can carry the manure which the farm needs. It will

\(^3\)messer Francesco is unknown.

\(^4\)This refers to messer Francesco.
be worth the expense. If the farm had been helped in the past it would have produced more income and it could have been self-supporting, but it cannot be done now. If I can manage this without taking money from the bank, I will do so. If I cannot get any elsewhere I will take it from the bank because I have to make some other essential purchases for the farm, as it cannot be allowed to deteriorate further. Piero still lives and if he needs anything he will go begging, as I cannot do more than I am able.\textsuperscript{5} He will be patient: may God call him to himself, it must be for the best!

According to what Giovanni Bonsi told me only two days ago, there is only until the 24th of this month for us to pay the 46\textsuperscript{6} impost. Because he would lose everything he withheld payment for two months and now he cannot delay any longer, so that I will make him pay it like the others.

I told you in a previous letter that I would advise you by every messenger what might happen about matters here. I have not done it because I have not heard anything new, at least nothing good for us: so you are advised. Nothing else has happened for me to tell you in this, except that I pray that God may keep you from ill. From your Alessandra Strozzi, in Florence.

Today the news has come here of the death in Bruges of Pier Bini and one of the Nasi. I believe that these galleys from Flanders are cursed as they had so much trouble from here for many years.

I heard in recent days that a galley, or indeed a ship, which Niccolo Ardinghelli sent, was expected

\textsuperscript{5}Piero and his wife Monna Cilia were the previous tenants on this farm who had become too old and infirm to continue.

\textsuperscript{6}This cipher is unknown.
and they were surprised that it had not arrived. I have not heard anything else and here the family are careful not to tell me anything. When I ask, they say they have had no letters from him.
LETTER 62

To Filippo and Lorenzo Strozzi in Naples.
In the name of God. 21st December 1465 (Received 4th January).

I wrote on the 19th of what had happened until then: since then I have had yours of 7th of this month. Reply as necessary.

I see from your letters you are well disposed to write to him,¹ and Lorenzo also, to do what has been discussed many times. Then they would see that the matter of the return of the exiles (51) has cooled off, as nothing is said of it. The signs are that it is all going to drag on longer than was expected, because of the setbacks that have ensued. Agnolo Acciaiuolo, Luca Pitti or Antonio Pucci (46, 54 or 57) would not have been believed and I do not know how Niccolò Soderini (18) will deal with it. It is believed that the damage is self-inflicted, and if this had caused harm only to them, it would not be so bad. But it has harmed us, who are waiting to come out of purgatory.² God be praised for everything, for what is happening to Soderini (18) is certainly his will. He showed that he wanted to do many things, and he was capable of it, and he would have been allowed to and helped, but then he took another course. So for a while one can put one's mind at peace and leave it to God. While things remain thus, the letters from King of Naples (47) are no good. You understand what is necessary and what has happened. The greatest changes of mind have been made from week to week and you would be surprised if you knew how things are here, but one

¹Niccolò Soderini, the Gonfalonier.
²For the return of Alessandra's exiled sons.
cannot write everything. We leave everything to God, which is for the best. If I were to hear anything I needed to speak to friends about, I shall do whatever is possible but for now no one talks about it. And while one cannot look forward to the recall of the exiles (51), one attends to marriage (33).

Yesterday Marco Parenti (13) came to me and he says that the father of the Tanagli girl (60) has changed. In effect he would not wish to spend anything, citing Giovanfrancesco Strozzi (53) who had arranged a dowry (63) of (unknown) amount (61) for his cousin and he asserts that Ardinghello had nothing. He says the same of Lionardo's father, and of the others of the household, who are not exiles (50). And this is the result of the discussions. Marco (13) replied to him, item by item, giving him many reasons why he should not deprive you of any part of the amount (61) she has as dowry (63). Then he said he would tell him (Tanagli) that he would not write to Lorenzo (45) about it, because he did not think it a reasonable alliance (33) without a dowry (63), and that if he (Marco) had no more from him (Tanagli), he did not wish to speak of it to Lorenzo (45). I do not know if there have been any other discussions between them. If there have I know that I would be advised, and although I told him I did not wish to write, he told me to do it, because of this discussion. We came to an agreement with Marco (13) that if the

³This passage is not easily comprehensible although it is obvious that Francesco Tanagli does not wish to pay a reasonable amount in dowry and is losing interest in having his daughter marry one of the exiled Strozzi.

⁴Francesco Tanagli appears to have learned of misdemeanours by members of the Strozzi parentado of which he does not approve.
dowry (63) came to 600 florins, and if he acquired the other portions, Lorenzo (45) must not withdraw, and if he could get more, he should come to an agreement on this. Giovanni Bonsi (14) feels the same as us. Now tell Lorenzo (45), that if he agrees he should advise us how much he will accept. And tell him, furthermore, that Caterina Tanagli (60) is, as I have written before, a big well-built girl, her face is not the most beautiful but it is not the rustic type and is long rather than round. She has olive skin and beautiful fair hair and she seems to be well mannered and will have a good family. It seems to me that the beauty would not fade quickly, as it is more than ordinary in my judgment. I will try to see her at these festivals (Christmas), without being obvious and having seen her, I will advise you of it. I know that Lorenzo (45) has thought of this for some time before he would give the commission to us, I believe that he would not mislead us. But Gondino’s sister-in-law ridiculed him and Pietro Paolo says it served him right, it was good for him. I tell you again, that he (Tanagli) has 500 florins in the Monte and 200f. have been deposited for her for the term, either seven years or indeed five, if she lives. You say that it is a little less than was discussed, and if she lives it is 300 florins less. If she should die before the 200 matured, it would be 500 less. But were he to have given us 1000, it is not out of friendship. So that if matters are not done as thoroughly as they say, then it is not such a deficiency unless something goes wrong. Except that as Manfredi did, who is giving 2000 florins as dowry to enter the ruling class but Giovanfrancesco Strozzi (53), Ardinghello and the other relatives
were nominated.  

I advise you further that yesterday I went to Pagolo’s house, which is directly opposite that of Fiammetta Adimari (59) and I saw her. She is beautiful, and I liked her very much as she has a lovely face and figure. Following our discussions, I know that she could be accepted without seeing more of her. But while the other daughter is not married it does not seem to me they wish to discuss this one. May God allow the best to follow. Because Marco Parenti (13) is a good proxy for his friends, and he is the one speaking, he will advise you in more detail of the outcome.

It is now 23rd December and Niccolò Soderini put the petition this morning to the Council of the People to have himself made a knight this Christmas, and won it: so that we shall have him a knight on that morning (Christmas). And this is the reward that they would have us accept and we will have to pay several florins to do him this honour.

This morning, wishing to seal the letter, Marco (13) came to me and said that he had just now met Francesco (Tanagli) whom he said had been with messer Antonio Ridolfi. He (Tanagli) told him that the Tanagli marriage (60) is not to be discussed any further all this month, because there are these developments in the city and he must allow this month to pass. Marco (13) showed that he did not care about this, and said that Tanagli is doing as he pleases. We believe that he must have something

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5Guasti understands this to mean that the large dowry was given to arrange a marriage with a family who had office in the government, footnote, p530. Bianchini agrees with this gloss.

6Fiammetta Adimari’s elder sister was not yet married.
else up his sleeve and is playing for time. 7 May everything be in the name of God. He (Marco) will not write anything of this to you, because he says he does not want you to confuse your mind, so he told me that I should not send this to you. I told him that I would not, but then as there were other things in it, I decided to send it, as there does not seem to me anything to confuse you. Instead I think that if you were wanting to take this course, you could think about it. On that account I ask you to say nothing of this news to Marco (13) because as I told him that I would not send it and then did send it, perhaps he would take it ill. But I do it so that you should be advised of everything and so that you may be able to think about what is necessary, at your leisure. Nothing else is necessary for now, as Marco (13) is not sure what Lorenzo (45) would think about it, if he does not agree. I pray God may keep you from ill. From your Alessandra Strozzi, in Florence.

7Another potential marriage alliance.
To Filippo and Lorenzo Strozzi in Naples.
In the name of God. 28th December 1465  (Received 8th January).

My last went on 23rd: since then I have had one of yours of 11th, and one from Lorenzo of 5th, kept with yours. Reply herewith.

It is true that on the 30th last (November) I wrote that I had not written because there was nothing good to write about. Sometimes I do not feel very well and I cannot stand the anguish of writing it. There is even more reason when certain things that are on my mind do not go the way I would wish, and these are the reasons that I do not write sometimes. I will try to write as often as possible, even when I have nothing good to tell you.

I told you in my last letter what Marco Parenti (13) had said to me about Francesco Tanagli (60). All this month he had wanted to refrain from speaking further about it, and that is what messer Antonio Ridolfo thought. Since then I have heard nothing else and I consider that he must have something else on his mind if he can arrange it and if not, he will resume with Marco. And it seems to me that enough time has been put into this; it has been postponed three or four times from September until now. And you appreciate that unless there is some other merchandise that we like that shows signs of wanting to meet the price of these two, Tanagli (60) and Adimari (59). It seems to Marco (13) and also to me that we should see what will happen at the end of the month and you will be advised of it.

May God allow the best to occur.

Concerning the matter of return of exiles (51) one hears nothing. I believe Agnolo Acciaiuolo (46)
and Antonio Pucci (57) and also Luca Pitti (54), have something to think about, and it is not the time to remind them of the matter of the exiles (50) which I believe would increase their difficulty as they did not do it when it was the right time. Those who do not work when the season requires it, do not make a good harvest: as he who has time and procrastinates, wastes it. May God be praised for everything. Dietisalvi (58) is very much better from the illness he had two months ago, which had made him very afraid. Yet God has given him grace and he is better than before. He and all his friends are very cheerful at his recovery. Only messer Otto Niccolini (17) and Antonio Pucci (56) remain ill and no one speaks well of it. With time one will see how this illness will end.

I told you on the 23rd December (in my last letter) how Niccolò Soderini was to be made a knight this Christmas, and this was passed in the Council of the People on Sunday which was the 22nd and then on the 23rd they called the Council of the Commune, and it was not won. They remained there (in Council) until three hours before sunset.¹ He was very demoralized and it was a great rebuke. And now it is clear, if it was in doubt before, how the minds of the people are quite disposed against him and what his friends can do. And on the same day that the said Council met, some citizens stood at the door, and they begged people to favour him and give him help so that he might win and the said Council members replied: 'That is the only reason we are here.' Then they treated him as you have heard! May God forgive them. This evening when the

¹The twenty four hour day in the Quattrocento commenced at sunset and thus 'ore 21' referred to twenty one hours after the previous sunset, or three hours before the next.
Electoral Council assembled, he stood on a tub and delivered a great sermon and it is said that this relieved his mind. He was told when he left that he would be cut to pieces. He indicated that he did not care about his life. Anyway he says he is not afraid that this might happen to him. And all this is going on and it is some months since the Conte di Maremma argued with him about some cattle and some pastures, when Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici died, and Niccolò Soderini won against them. This Conte (from Maremma) together with the people from Vernia did him (Soderini) great damage and had killed many of his cattle; and, unable to take revenge, he refrained. Since then messer Tommaso's son, that is Lorenzo, has gone to be captain at Campiglia garrison. As Niccolò Soderini (18) was Gonfalonier, Lorenzo di messer Tommaso took a hand in avenging Niccolò, and decided to arrest the said Conte of Maremma. They fled and the said Lorenzo banished them on pain of death, and set fire to all their houses, and burnt all their property and a great quantity of grain, and on those whom he captured, he inflicted harsh torture. Now he is told that these Conti will be the ones who will hack him (Niccolò) to pieces. This is the reason for these words. Niccolò does not seem to be afraid, and he said much more, which must not be written. He says furthermore that since they did not wish to make him a knight, he will go somewhere where it will be done despite their wishes. And it seems to me that he should think about it. May God help him. It is my understanding that if he had restored the innocent (exiles), which would have been such

2This Count from Maremma may be of the Malaspino family.

3This Lorenzo is probably messer Tommaso Soderini's son.
kindness then God would have helped him, and he would not have been as hated as he is. If he had done what he could, I think he would have gained a great deal. May it please God to take us out of this trouble in our days, if the best is to be.

You say that if you were able to come to see me, and I you, I would not have to send so many messages about your affairs. It is not God's will that we should have this happiness. Men have deprived you, and God has prevented me through illness. And my age has kept me from coming to see you. I believe that God has done it for the best.

Pierantonio (Buondelmonti) arrived, and embraced me on your behalf. And he says so many wonderful things about you that one third would be enough. He has made me many offers and he would like to be able to please you and he offers, as far as he can, to spare nothing in his power. He has read his Albertano, and is a good speaker. He is Giovanbatista's brother and they have a good grasp of words.

Francesco Caccini, who lived outside the Porta a Pinti, has died in these last days. He had the goodwill of the citizens. People were sorry that he was banished, and were moved to speak of his restoration. Now that he is dead, the friends will cool off. His death does a great deal of harm; first, he leaves a young wife with four children, two boys and two girls; and next is the great damage

4 Guasti, Lettere, p537 in a footnote explains that Alessandra is referring to Albertano da Brescia's treatise on rhetoric, Delle sei maniere di parlare. Alessandra believed him to be a great speaker, while Angela Bianchini says that this refers to him as a chatterbox, i.e. has the gift of the gab.

5 The 'friends' are those in power. The damage to the Strozzi is the loss of his support for the exiles.
done to our affair. May God help us as he can.

It is 30th December. They drew the Priors yesterday. Francesco Bagnesi is the Gonfalonier: he is the opposite of Niccolò. He is said to be a good man, but he does not speak as well as Niccolò. I will put the list of Priors in this. I have nothing else to say for now. May God keep you from ill. From your Alessandra Strozzi, in Florence.

From Santa Croce, the Gonfalonier, Francesco Bagnesi: and the artisan, Marco del Zaccaria and one Del Grazia. Santo Spirito; Piero del Benino, and Neruzzo del Nero. Santa Maria Novella; Benedetto Bartoli, and Bernardo Mazzinghi. San Giovanni; Matteo Villani, and Giovanni Giraldi.
LETTER 64

To Filippo in Naples.

In the name of God. 4th January 1466 s.c. (Received 15th January).

My last went on the 30th last, and I advised you what I had heard up till then from Marco Parenti (13) regarding the matter of the Tanagli (60). I have not had anything since of the Adimari (59), so I have nothing to tell you. I have since had yours of the 17th December, held until 19th. In the matter of marriage (33), as you have heard in the last letter, one has to wait and for this there is no reply. But I am of the opinion that I could see a way of looking elsewhere for the qualities we want and would let the Tanagli (60) be.¹ The Adimari (59) want to arrange a match for the elder daughter and then they will discuss the younger, whom I have seen and I like her. She does not seem as simple as I was told, and she is well built and very attractive. When I hear more, I will let you know.

I told you of the new Signoria; we have a Gonfalonier who is a good man true and for now they are busy legislating. But I do not hear what they are doing and it is not yet known what steps they will take. I have been told that Bagnesi (the new Gonfalonier of Justice) is not of the Medici party (54) nor of the Pitti party (58), but if he is so very good, may God give him paradise in the end. Niccolo has come down.² That night they made fires in the Piazza, and when he came out in the morning,

¹If there were any other girls to be found, Alessandra would be pleased to leave the Tanagli girl.

²The end of Niccolo Soderini's term as Gonfalonier of Justice.
they saw that some bundles of birch had been burnt to light his way and it is said that certain notices were put in place on the Piazza which said: ‘Nine madmen gone’.\textsuperscript{3} I do not know why this was said. It has been a great loss. I must not say more because it does not affect us. May God give us all peace of mind. It seems to me that it will drag on because this man is not at all as Niccolò Soderini (18) was in the beginning.\textsuperscript{4} The ruin must lie hidden. Luca Pitti (58) is moving up as much as he can: I think friends are doing the opposite.\textsuperscript{5} This part is not to be replied to. When I hear something I can write about, I will do so. There is doubt that the scrutiny will take place.\textsuperscript{6}

I talked to Gostanza, Pandolfo’s widow, about her son whom Pandolfo had discussed with you, and how he was thinking of giving one of his sons to the King. And now you were wondering if she still wished to do this.\textsuperscript{7} (I told her) she should think whether she wanted to give him but that you would gladly look after him there. She replied to me that

\textsuperscript{3}The nine madmen were the Gonfalonier, Niccolò Soderini and the eight Priors.

\textsuperscript{4}Probably Francesco di Rinieri di Bardo Bagnesi - see footnote 6, Guasti, p540. See Rubinstein, \textit{The Government of Florence}, Appendix VII, p295 for lists of Arroti in Balia of 1466, including this Bagnesi in the list for Quarter of Santa Croce as having been \textit{veduto} Gonfalonier of Justice.

\textsuperscript{5}The cipher 58 has been used for Luca Pitti and his supporters and was also used for Dietisalvi.

\textsuperscript{6}This scrutiny was the first revision since 1458 and restored their qualification to many citizens who had lost them in 1458. There were many complaints of flaws in the original revision, so fresh regulations were drawn up by the Signori who entered office on January 1st. It was finally passed at the end of January despite the opposition.

\textsuperscript{7}Guasti, Note A p515.
Priore had told her that the boy’s job would be to ride in front of the King and to race horses and this role was not to his liking, and to this she would never agree. And (she said) I should write to you for more information, and then they will think about it. As the one that she would send is eleven years old, it seems to her that she has time to think about it.

You have given Brunetto’s son food, and clothed him again, and warmed him, and given him money, and sent him back here. You have carried out three parts of the seven acts of mercy.8 You did very well not to look at what his father did to you, because he who has in him the charity can only do well, and God will help you and make you prosper more and more. May God concede you the grace, so that you may do the same to others who have caused you harm; that you may help them and save your own soul by returning good for evil. And there is no doubt that I take great comfort when I hear of the happiness and the prosperity that God has conceded you, that you are aware of what he has given you and how much you are obliged to God. I compare you with other men who are your equals,9 and who have been deprived not only of their homeland, Florence, but also of their property, while you are in a position where there are few exiles who have greater reputation and goods than you. And even here in Florence there are few who have more wealth than you which is amazing. It is said among those who seek husbands for their daughters, even those with large dowries, that there are not twenty young men of good family who have on their own account more than 1500 florins. So that you see how you are. Thank God,

8These are Faith, Hope and Charity.
9i.e., other exiles.
that you have a different reputation, and property, more than those at home in Florence or indeed in their native land. God has given us this unhappiness in our native city but you are given so much of other things, that you have to be content; and it would be so much better, if you had the company of a good wife. May God prepare one of the best for you, and she let her be found with careful thought, and not in haste.

In November, I wrote to you and Lorenzo, that on the 5th I had withdrawn 14 florins from the bank, exchanged at L4 s8 d4 to the florin. I paid L40 s8 d4 for catasto 47, and the rest of the money as alms for the love of God as I told you in my letter to you and Lorenzo. In yours of 27th you replied to it, and agreed to it as did Lorenzo. You are advised.

And on 2nd of this month (January) I had 16 florins from the said bank of Dietisalvi and Carlo Guasconi; I paid L40 7s 4d for catasto 46. Because it did not go to the Monte, it was left behind until now when they are beginning to collect the taxes. The rest of the money I have to spend on an ox for the farm at Pazzolatico. I thought I had the money to afford to buy the beast and also to provide stakes for the vines that are lying on the ground. I have to buy manure to restore it a little. Not having the money, I took these 16 florins at L4 8s 4d per florin, and put it to their account.

I read Marco what you wrote to me about Brunetto’s son. He told me that I should tell you that none of Brunetto’s sons had won a place in this scrutiny, although they were made accoppiatori. They will bear it in peace since people who were far more important than they were did not win. It is

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10The Accoppiatori were special officials who supervised the eligibility of citizens for election.
said of Antonio Pucci (56) and all of his supporters and of the Medici supporters (30), that if they will continue things as they are they will do less harm to those with little power than they did before.

Tell Lorenzo that I am not writing to him by this messenger as I have nothing to tell him except that Marco remains alert to yours and his matter.\textsuperscript{11} And although it is very cold here, we are not cool in your cause, and we expect to be called, and if we are, perhaps some conclusion would be reached; may it please God that this process may come to an end. Nothing else has happened to tell you in this. May God keep you from ill for a long time, as I would wish. From your Alessandra, Florence.

\textsuperscript{11}Guasti, L64, Note C, p546, believes that this refers to the negotiations with Francesco Tanagli.
LETTER 65

To Filippo Strozzi in Naples.
In the name of God. 11th January 1466 s.c.
(Received 23rd January).

My last letter was sent on January 4th. Since then I have had yours of 28th last (December) and I see that you write to me more so that I may have such pleasure from receiving your letter, than for any need there may be. You do give me great pleasure since I am not able to see you in person. I thank God for everything, which is perhaps the best. This reply to yours.

I told you in another letter what had happened about Francesco Tanagli (60) and otherwise there is nothing new. You are advised that concerning the Adimari(59) there will be no discussion until the despatch of the elder daughter.1 Otherwise it does not seem to Marco Parenti (13) that anything can be done while we are not clear about these two and what steps they will take. Judging by their age they should not delay too much in finding an outcome.2 It is true that it would be my wish to see you both married, as I have told you at other times. Every mother wants to see her sons married before she dies. I have tried to maintain what little I have had by giving up some things that I could have done for my soul and our dead so that your children might be able to enjoy what you have acquired over a long

1A marriage alliance was a commercial transaction, and the language such as merchandise and despatch was that of commerce.

2Caterina Tanagli was sixteen, approaching the age limit for marriage, which was the reason for her being seen as suitable for Filippo, Alessandra’s elder son who was nearly forty. On the other hand, Fiammetta Adimari was only fourteen.
period with so much effort and suffering. In the continuing hope that you will marry (and in consequence have children) I am content to have done so. My wish would be as I tell you. Since I heard Lorenzo's decision that he is willing to marry her to please me but would willingly wait two years to marry, I have thought about it many times. It seems to me that since there is no match of greater advantage and since we can wait these two years, it may be as well to stay as we are unless some great good luck befalls us. Otherwise there does not seem to be any reason for thinking of it now especially in the turmoil which rages at present, and the young men in the city willingly remain unmarried. The city is in a bad way and never did so much money go on the backs of the women as now. It is not such a large dowry, because when a girl marries an exile, her dowry is what she has in silk and jewels, and we would not need it here. Although I have written nothing to Lorenzo about it, I have not looked for anyone else for him, and we were waiting to see whether either of the two negotiations has been resolved first in your favour. If the result of the

3Alessandra is undoubtedly referring to the younger Adimari girl, initially earmarked for Lorenzo. Lorenzo had hoped to marry Marietta di Lorenzo di messer Palla Strozzi, but his brother Filippo believed that the handicaps with which she was burdened were too great. Her grandfather and father had been exiled in 1434, both her parents were dead, and then her uncle, Giovanfrancesco was bankrupt.

4The turmoil to which Alessandra refers is the political upheaval and the ensuing financial failures.

5Dowries of 2000 florins were being asked.

6The dowry offered by Francesco Tanagli was only 1000 florins. The cash portion of the dowry could not leave Florence with the bride of an exile, except with permission of the Commune.

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Tanagli negotiations (60) had come through we would have tested the water for the other one for Lorenzo. There is provision there if they would give it, and it would have been welcome at any time. Now that matters are going as they are, it seems to me that we can wait for a little while for him (Lorenzo). And I see that, according to what he writes to me in every letter, he is content to wait another two years, and all in good time perhaps people will be at peace. In the meantime things could happen and they would not offer a wife without money as is now done. It seems to those who must pay it, to be superfluous to give a dowry to exiles (50). Marco (13) has written to you that the father of Caterina Tanagli (60) withdrew, as I wrote to you. You say that you leave it to us to watch and negotiate. I, for my part, have been diligent, and I would not know how to do more than I have done. It is more for your consolation than mine, because my time is short, and yours, as is right, must be longer. May it please God that it be so. And Marco still attends to your business with diligence. May God allow the best to ensue. And tell Lorenzo to set his mind at rest about a wife.

Niccolò (Soderini) has departed from office and he did some good things, but not what I would have wished. 7 Little tribute has been paid to him or to the others who left, neither while they were in office nor since they left. The scrutiny was a disadvantage to us, but I hear that the one elected will run to ground, and they think it will be done over again. This Signoria has been in session for several days and nothing can be found out because they have passed a banishment decree against anyone who reveals anything of the many matters in this

7Niccolò Soderini's term as Gonfalonier of Justice finished at the end of December, 1465.
session, especially those that are very secret. And I have been told that Dietisalvi (58) is everything while Luca Pitti (54) is not, and therefore Antonio Pucci (56) will return in the top rank, according to my judgment, if matters continue as one sees at present. May God, who is able, provide a remedy for this city which remains ill. Niccolò Soderini entered proudly and then was humiliated and as his brother (Tommaso Soderini) told Giovanni Bonsi (14): 'He came in a lion and will go out a lamb'. That is what happened to him. When he saw that the votes did not go his way he began to feel humiliated, and since he left office he goes around sometimes with five, sometimes with six armed men close to him for fear of the Conte di Maremma or the others. Better that he had never been; he would not have laid bare so many enmities.

Regarding the fourteen florins taken from the bank on 5th November, you were advised of it and you replied to me in the same month.

Tell Giovacchino that on 4th of this month I had the bundle of flax for the Sisters. It arrived so late that I had sealed the letter and therefore I did not advise you of it. I have since opened the bundle and there are 12 skeins. I have given four of them to that Sister at the convent of San Domenico and I am waiting for the Sister at Santa Marta to send for another four, and four will go to the one at Polverosa. I am still waiting for them to send for it. I have not weighed it but there are four bundles each. They will advise Giovacchino of the weight and with this may be a letter from the Sister at Santo Domenico to give to him. When the others write, I will send the letters to you.

There is nothing else that I know of to tell

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58 has been used to designate Luca Pitti but it seems possible that it refers to Dietisalvi here.
you, except that you will have heard of some marriages announced recently between the daughter of messer Piero de’Pazzi and Braccio Martegli and the daughter of Antonio with Priore Pandolfini. Each has a dowry of 2000 florins. Messer Piero’s daughter has poor sight in one eye. I hear nothing here about Giovanfrancesco’s niece (Marietta) but from Pierantonio I hear that she is to be married in Mantua to messer Benedetto Strozzi’s son. I do not know whence he heard it, and Giovanni di ser Francesco told me the same when he returned. They must be bringing this news back from there. If it is not true, you might think about it, whether Niccolo Strozzi could put in a word to Giovanfrancesco for Lorenzo (45). Although I do not believe that she would go so low, nevertheless sometimes one goes to places that the other would not have believed, for things that are necessary for death or for other events. So think about it. Nothing else for this. May God keep you from ill.

From your Alessandra Strozzi, Florence.

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Marietta, daughter of Lorenzo di messer Palla and Alessandra de’ Bardi, has been discussed at some length in an earlier footnote. She did not marry Benedetto Strozzi’s son.
LETTER 66

To Filippo Strozzi in Naples.
In the name of God. 25th January 1466 s.c.
(Received 4th February).

My last was sent on 17th January and yesterday evening I had two of yours, of 6th and 13th; herewith I will answer as much as I know.

Until today, the father of the Tanagli girl (60) still says nothing. I understand that Messere is not pleased.¹ He is in agreement with Tommaso, the brother of Niccolò Soderini (18) and with 30² and also with the Cavaliere to whom you paid so much honour there. It is a tug-of-war. It does not seem to bear any fruit so that I believe that messer Antonio is the reason why our friend has not reacted because he is the enemy of 47,³ as I told Marco two days ago. He hinted to you about it when he told you that messer Antonio had advised them that he was not doing anything yet, as it was better to wait a little to see what happened. So he is surely the cause. Francesco had shown signs of coming to us willingly but since Christmas he has not spoken to Marco (13) about it. I would have half a mind to abandon this match if something else came to hand,

¹messer Antonio Ridolfi, a brother-in-law of Francesco Tanagli.

²Guasti designated 30 as possibly signifying Medicean supporters.

³Guasti, p386 writes that 47 is the King of Naples and also Filippo Strozzi. Another editor, Bianchini, p294 claims 47 to be Piero de' Medici, and on p201, 47 is Filippo Strozzi. It seems that messer Antonio Ridolfo is against the Strozzi alliance because he is the enemy of Piero de' Medici, and therefore in this instance 47 is probably Filippo Strozzi, and friend in this case may be Francesco Tanagli.

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or if the elder Adimari daughter (59) found a match. There is nothing else for us and Tanagli is waiting to see the result. This long wait goes against our wishes. I believe that everything is for the best, and as I told you in another letter, we are giving no thought at present to matrimony (33). I do not need to tell you anything else about the dowry (63) as this is not going to spoil the deal. Concerning the Ardinghello daughter, I hear she has nothing. Giovanfrancesco Strozzi (53) had promised to do it himself, which he had since revoked as he did not want to carry it out. I do not really understand, nor have I ever heard the reason for what Giovanfrancesco (53) did. I have never heard any talk. I will try to find out something, and I will advise you of it. Our Iacopo had 500 shares in the Monte, as you say, and they made him buy more shares (in the Monte) out of the interest every year so that she had (unspecified) florins of dowry (61). Antonio Strozzi was the proxy to take the payments to make this amount. And, as you say, you have a good proxy for your business, because Marco is well-disposed towards us for your honour and advantage so that, in my opinion, it is not necessary for you to worry about it. May God prepare well for us.

According to what is said, matters here are going as ill for souls as possible. It seems to those who are waiting, that they are delaying too long to break the ice. Our Signori have been in

4It is not clear why Giovanfrancesco promised a dowry for the Ardinghello daughter and Alessandra does not understand what happened.

5Iacopo di Lionardo Strozzi was the brother of Niccolò and Filippo, and cousin of Matteo di Simone. He acted as mentor to Lorenzo di Matteo and died in Bruges in March 1461. Lorenzo managed Iacopo’s estate for his family.

6For Iacopo’s illegitimate daughter, Isabella.
session since 19th (January) and, among these Maggiori who are governing us, one wants one thing and someone else wants another. Yet they adopted two dishonourable methods of redrawing the scrutiny, one the way of one party and one of the other. And the method that had more beans (votes) they put to the Council of One Hundred (which is the first Council) three days ago, and the motion was defeated. Even if it does pass this Council, it is the opinion here that it will not pass in the People and the Commune. Only the Council of the Commune failed to agree to the public honours for Niccolo Soderini, so that it was not lost and he could leave thus honoured. They get what they want and the city remains in trouble!

The wife of 57 has recently been ill for several days and I heard that it was only depression. And mona Gostanza di Bernardetto told me that Bernardo had died of depression at hearing of the bold entry of Niccolò Soderini (as Gonfalonier). He was afraid he would be exiled and every day he said: 'What will I do, old and infirm, far from my home?' And according to what I hear, Dietisalvi (58) was also afraid. So much is done, may God provide, as he is able, for those in need.

The petition was passed in the Council of One

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7See Rubinstein, The Government of Florence, pp149-153, describing the attempts by both parties to ensure electoral success. It is not possible to determine which particular methods Alessandra refers to here.

8The Council of the People and the Council of the Commune.

9In Letter 69, Bianchini suggests that the code number 57 refers to Luca Pitti.
Hundred: there is nothing else to say of Luca Pitti (54) or Dietisalvi (58) or their friends, for now. We are in a situation where friendship is to be tested. I am sure there is no hope to be had from Dietisalvi (58), who breaks his word and I certainly have no hope of Luca Pitti (54), who is an unpleasant man. But I do have confidence in his friends. May God, in his mercy, direct us well.

Niccolò (Soderini), as you say, did and said some good things, and some to the contrary. He is the man who caused this uproar in the city and he has lost a great deal by it. I hear that in the Palagio (Palazzo) he is not required for anything that is done there and he never comes. He goes through the city with seven armed men behind him because he has a great worry on his shoulders. He fears that one day something unpleasant could happen to him and he would have to face what he has done to others.

You looked after Giovanni di ser Francesco and Piero Antonio at your own expense and well may they praise you, for they have good reason. May God give you grace that you may long do honour to those who arrive on your doorstep. I sincerely wish that since messer Francesco asked you for help with the letters that he needs from the King, he might have a judgment in his favour, which judgment should be dragged from the hands of that wolf, Antonio Pucci (56) who has held on to his benefice so long by force. May God help right.

I hear that the galleys from the Levant (East) have arrived there (?Ancona) and they are expected here at any time. Lionardo Ginori is there. His

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10 This petition was the proposal to have a new scrutiny to add the names of eligible citizens to the purses, which had not been enlarged since 1458. Ibid, p150.

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family says that he has suffered no loss which is good. And it is said that Niccolo Ardinghelli has left and that his ship arrived in Ancona some time ago with many goods and he has not yet arrived. It is said that he has earned a lot of money, and a part of it was won from Carlo Martegli, so that he should be able to pay you.

You say that I should have heard from Giovanni (Bonsi) of your idea to help him improve himself and of your view that at his age (51 years), this is more honourable for him and for you. This would be more settled for him and also for you who have to remain in exile. You say that you would want two things from me before the matter is concluded; the first is what I think of him, and whether I think he can pay you back, the second is that he write to you of his debt of 200 gold florins. He should indicate whether he wants you to assist him and that if you did help him willingly for one year, you would want the 40 florins he owes you returned at the end of the year. And because you know that I love you, it is right that I should examine his situation and advise whether you should help him, lest when the time comes, there is a falling out between you, as happens more often than not. And if you do help him, where would he get the money to pay you back in time, and whether he has other debts beside these 200 florins. Firstly I tell you, he has never said anything to me of the idea of starting a shop, but I heard of it from Giovanni di ser Francesco when he

11The following passage is self-explanatory. Giovanni Bonsi obviously managed his family finances very poorly.

12It was important for Filippo di Matteo and his brother Lorenzo to have their parentado without stain. Giovannifrancesco Strozzi's bankruptcy was already a problem, so a debt-ridden and impecunious brother-in-law would have been a serious problem.
returned from there (Naples). I spoke to him of it, and he told me that the said Giovanni di ser Francesco had told him. I have heard nothing else since except that yesterday, I had a letter from Lorenzo of 10th (January), in which he says 'We would indeed want to help Giovanni if we could' and I told Giovanni Bonsi about it. He replied 'They (Filippo and Lorenzo) want to start a wool shop with Carlo and Giovanni di ser Francesco'. We did not go into details so this is as much I have heard from him. And as for Giovanni Bonsi, if he were in charge there, I believe that he would manage it well because he seems to me eager and competent, but as for his handling of money, I cannot judge whether he would pay it back on time as he also has his needs. It is true that until now, from what I have seen, he does his duty. When he has taken my money, or when I have lent him some, even though it was only small amounts, he always pays it back on time. I hear the same from people who have to do business with him. I do not know how he will behave now that he is to have money in hand. He has a large family, eight mouths to feed, and three harvests from which he had nothing, what with the storm and bad weather, and having to give the grain and wine that he had to della Luna in exchange for fabrics. He has not enough for his family's requirements. They are badly dressed and when Alessandra needs to mend a gown, she puts the cloak on over the shirt until it is repaired. Since her need is so great, I do not know how to decide what to do. He has little means to make a profit so he would be better with help than without. He is not a fool and he has a righteous fear of disgrace. Of the second part, he says he owes 200 gold florins, but I believe it to be at least that or more. He is a person who does not say much about his affairs and I see that
sometimes when he pledges (pawns) the few clothes that he has, he avoids me, as if he is ashamed that I should know of it. I do not know what debts he may have, other than the 80 florins Marco lent him last year for a dowry (to enter in the Monte delle doti) for his daughter and he has no need to borrow from you to repay that debt to him (Marco). Last year he borrowed, with a year to pay, to buy some cloth which he sold for cash to pay a lawsuit. He has lost it all. I believe that he may have taken more of the cloth than this because he has had little income and great expenses. And further, he bought on credit the rose cloth from which his mantle for the Scrutiny was made and for which he has yet to pay. Thus I believe he could owe a little more and I do not believe your 40 (florins), nor Marco’s 80 would be included in the figure of 200. I do not know his debt, but when he wanted to sell the Selve, Marco asked him if he had any other debts that he knew of, and he said no. Marco discouraged him (from selling) when the market turned down. I would like you to help him. On the other hand, I do not know where he could find the money to pay you in the end. I do not think, unless he has some good luck, that he would be in a position to be able to lay his hand on such a sum of money a year from now. And if he could not, and if he is not answerable, it would create a scandal. It would be better to hold back. I am given to understand that the time for repayment of the 200 florins is approaching, and as I say, he is asking for money for his fabrics. I have quite understood what you write, and if you want payment on time, I believe one should not have anything to do with him. On the other hand, he is so good and obliging that I would not wish that he should come to harm or be disgraced. And about the salary which he should
have at the shop, his debts should be deducted and no orders allowed to be made against it. I have told you as much as I know of his affairs, and you have not told me that I should let it be known that I know he has asked you for money. If you wanted, I would have said to him frankly: 'Giovanni, you asked Filippo for so much money. You know that it is the greatest favour one can do, and if it is not repaid on time, it would be the most embarrassing. I would not wish in any way that there should be any public embarrassment created between you for I would be very grieved. So tell me where you think you will get the money to repay him.' And I would soon see what would happen, because I know at first hand what he has. But you have advised me not to, so I will say nothing of it until I hear something else from you; and I will try, if I can, in the meantime, to learn whether he has other debts, and I will let you know. I am sorry for him, for he is very good and perhaps too much. He has suffered a blow with his crops on account of which he thought he was ruined. Yet he has not as much damage as he believed; God be praised! Nothing else for now. May God keep you from ill. From your Alessandra, Florence.

Have patience reading this, because I have so much to say.

Piero Antonio came here this morning, and told me that you should support Piero (Medici) and messer Agnolo (Acciaiuolo) and that I should so write to you. I have done so. He commended himself to you. I told him if he wants to repay you for the honour that you have done him, he can find you a beautiful wife. I have opened that (letter) for Giovanni Bonsi, which is in this, to see if you said anything of the money.
LETTER 67.

To Filippo Strozzi in Naples.

In the name of God. 30th January 1466 s.c. (Receipt unknown).

My last letter went on 25th: I have yours of 18th today. I reply to this as necessary.

Concerning 60 (the Tanagli daughter) nothing else has happened; and, as I told you in another letter, I believe that Messere (Pierantonio), her brother-in-law, may be the reason and he may have dissuaded her; as, according to his own words to 13 (Marco), that Messere had said, one believes this is the cause. If you do not understand me, read my letter of 25th; that, according to what I understand, he (Messere Pierantonio) is the enemy of 50 (the exiles) and of their ancestors; and I am sure that it is not on account of any coolness towards us that 13 (Marco) did not respond, as it did not seem to him to do justice to Lorenzo; but I understand that Messere is not well; and their deeds show this. And for now he (Marco) has not made a decision on 60 (the Tanagli daughter) who has to fight because of the need (of her father) she would save several hundreds. And if 45 (Lorenzo) thinks that this is not succeeding, what other remedy is there for his affairs; he must think of what to do for himself, he has problems! for such problems cause more trouble for a friend than if he had to do it for himself. And tell him he will be advised as to what will be thought best: and it is not necessary to proceed too quickly but to wait to see what happens about this.

This morning, the motion that was passed in the Cento (Council of One Hundred) was passed in the Consiglio del Popolo (Council of the People); that
is to discard the part of the scrutiny already made and the elected candidates:¹ so that, some who were pleased are now upset; and it is not for 46² and 57 (Luca Pitti); and I believe 58 (Antonio Pucci) gives them cause to think. They say that the city is in trouble, because no one is working here; and the grain of the Commune, is poor and costs 30 soldi a bushel of 48 pounds and the remainder of the home-grown grain, which is good, costs more than 35 soldi. So that, people think that with things following one after the other, as they do, if Florence is in trouble now, worse is yet to come. And I have been told, that if 58 (Antonio Pucci) and his friends get what they want, the lira will fall to 50 soldi 10 (denari), which it is not: and it seems to me that this is also a reason for not discussing the Tanagli daughter.

You say that to have done what was done at the departure of the old Signoria is to generate hatred rather than peace. But what would you say of what follows and of the voting papers that are found on the ground, on which (according to what I hear) are written wicked things libelling the citizens. Among other little rhymes, they say: 'Piero di Cosimo and Tommaso Soderino, - And Anton Puccio and Moncherino, - And the Thirty wish to throw out the scrutiny'. And then follows other news, which I have remembered: because it is said cautiously. So that you see what peace one seeks! Niccolo is waiting to take action, attending to his own affairs and he goes about with his armed guards. May God give us grace to stop this evil, and then remain in peace.

I will not say anything else to Gostanza di Pandolfo about her son.

¹Rubinstein, The Government of Florence, p152.

²This codename is unknown.
You paid back 14 florins for expenses in November; and then the 16 (florins) I had from the bank; and you have been advised of what the money was spent on: as L40.7.4 was paid for the catasto '46; and I have kept the remainder of the money, because the animal has not yet been bought for the farm; I will buy it when a good one is found. I have a good idea that it is a farm which can be helped, and with help, it will be more productive: as it is prolific. May it please God that its owner may enjoy it.

God be praised, the galleys arrived here safely. You are the one who receives the good fortune because each one that arrives in this city strikes a blow for Family. May it please God that you should long have honours and wealth. Although I have your letters, I will be pleased to hear news from those who have seen you and I thank God for it.

I will talk to Tommaso about his rescue; and, when I see him, I will reproach him for it; because apart from Tommaso's match, it was also your parentado.

A motion has been passed in the Council of the Commune, this day, 31st; and they have concluded the other affairs mentioned above, and they have turned to new things and this very day they have also won in the Council of One Hundred. They have to confirm the magistrates or, in fact, reconfirm them and renew the nomination of the selectors. Count on it that the people are very discontented, but there is none here who is worth a fig. 58 (Antonio Pucci) remains firm and determined and his friends the same; and 56 (Luca Pitti) is busy with affairs here and there. The brother of 18 (Niccolo Soderini) has attained higher office than ever; and he has honey

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\(^3\)This cipher is unknown.
in his mouth and a razor at his belt; and matters are going in a way that, though I may be of little intellect, it does not seem to me while these intrigues continue, wise to open a shop or anything else in this city, until one can see what will happen: because there are those who have the opinion that the world is coming to an end, and soon: so that I think I should wait a little while to see. Nevertheless you know better than me what is to be done; and so those who support you know more about it than me.

I told you regarding 14 (Giovanni Bonsi), that putting him in a place where he does not have to manage money would be good for him and for you because he is faithful and means well: but I told you of the one doubt I had about his managing money, because of his great need. And I have thought that if you lend him the amount you said, I cannot see any way that he would be able to repay it on time. Despite his income, his expenses grow all the time as the girls grow up: and then I believe that, in addition to the debt that he says that he has, he has others: so that he will have trouble covering this. Now you should think about what is to be done, whether to save him or not; as I cannot find out if he has any other debt, other than the one I have told you in another letter.

It is now 1st February, and I hear that yesterday the petition put to the Council of One Hundred was passed on the first vote; and the reason was that these principal citizens have reached an agreement in just a few days: their affairs are a joke. One day it seems they want 50 (exile) and the next day they have made peace, as children do. I am foolish to write it as every day they change their minds, and they twist like leaves in the wind. Messere Agnolo (Acciaiuoli) has left and will have
arrived there as you receive this. You will hear the truth of the matters here, that once he had reached agreement with the others, he left. Niccolo Soderini, who was so proud to take part in the scrutiny, is now proud of undoing what he had done: finding himself in the Council of the Commune, he made the black beans' public and declared to those near him, that they should do the same. So you see how quickly he has changed! but I do not believe them, however, in spite of all appearances. May God, who can, make peace between them if he can, or in truth there will be a great war; because then I could have hope that matters would end. Nothing else for this letter. May God keep you from ill. From your Alessandra Strozzi, Florence.

'Black beans represent 'no' votes.
To Filippo Strozzi in Naples.

In the name of God. 7th February 1466 s.c.
(Received 20th February).

My last letter went on the first; and yesterday I had yours of 26th last. Reply.

Nothing has happened about Tanagli since the last (letter), neither for Lorenzo nor for the others. It is still my intention that you look for another (wife): he (?Francesco Tanagli or Marco Parenti) has been rather displeased about it than otherwise; and I have had it, and I have so much, which has kept me awake on more than one night; because the need seemed important to me. Now I/we cannot 'recall' what I would be able to do, which is not done: we say it may be all for the best. Of 59 (Fiammetta Adimari) it would seem to me that she would be too young for you (Fiammetta was nearly 15 and Filippo almost 40): but if she wanted to come (to marriage with Filippo), I would not refuse her; but I do not believe so much happened in respect of 63 (dowry). It has been said today that she has been sold to one who has a head full of beans (conceited), and it is not yet Lent (beans used in lenten fasting). Still he has not sold the other one, who was in front (the elder). If this is true, one will hear soon. The land (Florence), and indeed the citizens being in disagreement, greatly harmed the same merchandise (political discord created bad atmosphere for marriage arrangements): because contrary to finding oneself a vote, one does not expect it; as they continue with the marvellous effort and they lose the eating and sleeping, according to what I hear Marco Parenti and Giovanni Bonsi say, who are of those who work hard. I do not
extend myself in this; although 46 knows everything: and I have not heard (the reputation of) 58 being diminished, but the contrary: and so, after him, Niccolò Soderini's brother (Tommaso), who seems to me to have a great reputation today. May it please God that what must be takes effect soon.

I told you in another (letter) what I had heard about Giovanni Bonsi, as well as the income/interest, he has several hundreds of trees, which he has placed in position for his children; when they are ready to cut, they will be worth several hundreds of florins; as one gets more than one florin per one (tree): they will come in 5 years to more than 200 florins, and the others even more. And having dowries for the girls, he would be able to rely on borrowing 200 large florins, which he mentions requesting from Lorenzo, for these trees. And I have told you this, so that you understand that I know the income he has.

I hear of the offers that they made you to take the young men; which, if you had the company of Cosimo (Medici bank) he would need: and according to what you say, and I hear also from Piero Antonio, that there he has so few matters, when you have too many. I understand who they are, and that which he writes to you of the florins of 57; which having taken none of these three, you will take this nephew of 57 more quickly. You told Giovanni that you paid attention: he knows him, and it seems that he should put him in a good light; also he wishes to examine him better. But not to rely on him too much, as taking him you would have to have nothing better; as, according to what I hear, people who are for them are badly served; and to take the most where they cannot see. And Giovanni told me: 'If I do not need him, I would not take him; because the people who do not do well, it is not the same to them.
They never did well for their relatives; and also if they took him, he would be more useful to them. They are very poor, and have no money. Also I will hear from the boy, what may not appear to Giovanni, and by the next I will advise you of it. These people destroy and burden the company, as they look after their own affairs: and when the requests are made by one of your equals of another matter of importance, and they are helping themselves by saying, 'I cannot; because there is someone who gives annoyance'. And we, who are their dependents, must submit. I am not saying this because I am not in agreement with those you took; because I would love to have him; and I am going to the mother of the young man: and needing it, I would support you; but I would not say that I spoiled it for you. Make of it what you can. Messere Agnolo will be there, and you will understand how matters remain here; which seem to me may not be going well for us; because I understand the matters in this between the two of them, which are delaying our affairs. May God provide for our need.

Of Niccolò Soderini there is nothing new; as he departs in the usual way. He has been paid as little tribute as possible, and also his companions. I believe he may be distressed. He may receive what he has done to others.

It seems to me that you should understand the need for more respect for Giovanfrancesco Strozzi's niece (Marietta). Of Giovan Francesco you will have heard that he has returned to Venice; and the reason is, that the way he carries the creditors, who one suspects he has not been exiled as a rebel. I heard from Giovanni Bonsi that he took the risk, and it was not obtained; and this will make it so much worse for the lineage.

Other times I wrote to you that Giovanni Bonsi
wanted to raise from the Monte the money he had there for Allesandra (his wife), to buy back his possessions; and you sent the power of attorney. Since then, not being able to reinvest the said money, they are in a plight. Now, the Monte being also of good value, it seemed to him to sell it; as, according to what is said, 400 florins remain; which he reckoned, when he had it, at 21 florins percent; which the Monte was thus valued at that time. Now it is valued at 30 florins percent, or more; so that he says: If I sell them, it will be about 600 florins, as 200 florins were advanced of it. And it seems it must be done so: and of the said money to replace it in your hands; and you held so much of it, that you thought to buy a property; or indeed, the Monte falling, to buy back into the Monte. And it is true that this selling the Monte to buy it back, lowering the price, is not regarded as a permissible contract: he has wanted to do this at other times, selling them (the shares) and putting (the proceeds) in deposit, so that the Monte fell, and then to buy back; and he discussed it with Marco (Parenti); and he was disheartened by it, because it was not a legal contract. Now, saying he wanted to give them to you, as many as you bought, I told him that I had written to you of his idea. And so he tells me it is done. Tell now what you think of it; as I do not have good judgment in this: because I would want his profit (interest); on the other hand, I do not see it to be time to buy property; which one is not able to sell, if refused at 30 soldi per lira: and when the Monte fell, buying back, is not legal: so that I do not know whether to be encouraged or discouraged: because putting giving it on deposit, he will have the same interest that he has in the Monte, and will not have that fault. So tell him how it seems to you.
It is now 8th (February), and there is still nothing new; as there is great turmoil here about this scrutiny.

I am reminded to tell you that Niccolò Ardinghelli will be able to pay you; because it is said that he has made a good 8000 florins. You will have to have heard of the return of the galleys. His wife is here, and rejoicing; as she has again been fashionably dressed, with a few big and beautiful pearls: and so it was that a ball was held on 3rd in his room, in the Pope's Hall at Santa Maria Novella church; arranged by Lorenzo di Piero. And there was with him a company of young people dressed in the same style of gowns of peacock brown embroidered with beautiful pearls. And Lorenzo is one of those who wore brown dress with pearls of great value! Thus they celebrated the winning of so much money. Nothing else for this. May God keep you from ill. From your Alessandra, Florence.
LETTER 69

To Filippo Strozzi in Naples.
In the name of God. 15th February 1466 s.c.
(Received 28th February).

My last went on 8th; and having had none from
you since, I have less to write in this: I do so
just to advise you of what I have heard about the
nephew of Luca Pitti (57). Firstly he is eighteen
and according to what I have been told, and also
from what can be seen in his appearance, he is calm,
he has no vices, he is sensitive and is taller than
his elder brother, who is growing taller than
Girolamo, and his skin is not white, it is very pale
and yellow. Tommaso Ginori knows what he looks
like, if you wish to ask him. I believe he would be
a credit to himself. Giovanni Bonsi, too, has told
me that he is quiet and will get on well. And he
does not seem to be like the fellow Carlo asked you
about who comes here sometimes with the letters and
who resembles his uncles in speech and seems to be
cunning. The first one I told you of does not seem
like that, and although he does not seem so
experienced, I do not hold him to be inferior. I do
not know what you will decide. It would seem to me
that if you do not need to, do not take on this
burden; and especially if you believe he might not
be of use to you. According to what I hear there
would be little help from his father, because he is
regarded as not very obliging. He has not been in
favour for a while now since he lost much when he
was one of the officials of the Abbondanza because
he is said to have taken a good rake-off.¹

¹This may refer to Luca Pitti’s brother, who was
the father of the ‘nephew’ referred to at the
beginning of this letter. The Abbondanza or Communal
Girolamo's father, who was in charge of him, was a director and administrator and each held the bag for the other.² It is said that, other than his salary, he stole cuts from more than one thousand; and all from the poor men who are supported by the same thieves, and they have much abused him. The current officials have made a good decision that Lotto (Lotti) keep the bags of grain in hand sealed and he sends them here like that. Before, when they were unsealed I tell you that he took a good cut. They do not seem to pay any heed to the humiliation they suffer, because they are so busy doing harm. Thus in the eyes of those who desire the communal good, they lose their good reputation: and according to what I hear, the father of the young man has already lost his. By now you will have been with Agnolo Acciaiuolo (46), and you will have heard about what is happening here. And if 57 (Luca Pitti) is a true friend of 45 (Lorenzo), as you believe, and is able to help him anyway, he will do it without your taking on the nephew. Therefore think about it and do what seems best to you.

Of the matter of marriage (33) for Lorenzo (45), nothing else has been done. The father of the Tanagli girl (60) continues to say nothing further. I have told Marco (13) that in any case it seems to me he should speak to Dietisalvi (58) about marriage with the Tanagli daughter (60) and the Adimari daughter (59) to see what can be done about it. Without hope of these girls, he (Marco) will have to look elsewhere. I advise you that I have told Marco (13) that if it is possible to have the Tanagli

Grain Store bought food supplies for redistribution on behalf of the Commune, in times of poor harvest and hardship. This provided another opportunity for government appointments and corruption.

²Girolamo di Lotto Lotti.
girl, he should not worry about the money because if
one does look askance at this,(a small dowry) one
may never reach an agreement. It seems to me time
to settle this matter. And in my next letter I
believe I should be able to tell you something, if
Marco (13) does what I think he should do, and
speaks to Dietisalvi (58). Nothing else for now.
May God keep you from ill. From your Alessandra
Strozzi, in Florence.
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