Within a year of Eleonora’s return from Naples in November 1477 all formal links between Ferrara and Naples had been broken and Ercole d’Este and his brother-in-law, Alfonso, duke of Calabria, were confronting each other from opposite sides in the conflict known as the Pazzi War.¹ The immediate catalyst for this conflict was attack on Lorenzo de’ Medici and his brother, Giuliano, by members of the rival Florentine Pazzi faction in Florence Cathedral on Easter Day, 26 April 1478, although the dispute which culminated in Giuliano’s assassination had a far longer gestation. It can in fact be argued that the event which ultimately drove the Italian states into two warring camps in September 1478 was Galeazzo Maria Sforza’s agreement to sell the Romagnolo city of Imola to Florence in May 1473 and Sixtus IV’s decision to oppose that sale.² This dispute initiated a series of local skirmishes in the Romagna between Sixtus and Florence, whose political life had been dominated by the faction led by Lorenzo de’ Medici since his father’s death in 1469. By the end of 1474, the Papacy and Florence were members of two opposing defensive alliances with Sixtus IV and Naples in one and Florence, Milan and Venice in the other. When members of the two alliances began to prepare for war in June 1478, Ercole d’Este, who had declared his support for the triple

¹ For overview and bibliography, see Lauro Martines, April Blood: Florence and the Plot Against the Medici (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
² In May 1473, Galeazzo Maria Sforza had agreed to sell the city of Imola, a papal fief, to the Florentines. This sale was opposed by Sixtus IV and Ferrante of Naples, fearful that Florence would extend her influence further in the Romagna. Their combined appeals being sufficient to induce Sforza to restore Imola to the Papacy, it was then conferred as a fief on Sixtus’s nephew, Girolamo Riario; see Dover, “Royal Diplomacy,” 71, n. 55; Lubkin, 166–67, 338, n. 67.
alliance in February 1475, was set to become commander-in-chief of its army.

This chapter will examine Ercole d’Este’s involvement in the Pazzi War, in particular his decision to join the Florentine alliance in defiance of his father-in-law, and to compound that affront by accepting the position of commander-in-chief of the allied army, so that, when the war began in September 1478, he had positioned himself directly in opposition to his own brother-in-law, Alfonso, duke of Calabria. Ercole’s decision would test his marriage to the daughter of the king of Naples, although evidence will be presented which suggests that the marriage remained strong despite the challenges presented by Eleonora’s anomalous position. A considerable number of documents from the period of the Pazzi War are conserved in the Archivio di Stato in Modena, however, these resources have not up until now been explored for evidence of Eleonora’s loyalty to Ercole and his state during the largely inconclusive campaigns of the war. Was Eleonora able to dismiss from her mind all thoughts of her birth family in Naples, her brothers on the battlefield, and her children left in the custody of her father? Did she devote herself single-mindedly to loving Ercole and supporting him in his role as Captain-general of the allied army? The contradictions of her own situation would have been made particularly obvious to Eleonora as the attempted assassination of Lorenzo de’ Medici followed closely upon her return from Naples. Despite the cracks that had continued to emerge in the relationship between Ercole and her father during her five months in her natal city, her visit had allowed her ample time to re-connect emotionally with her brothers and other members of her extended family circle. Of particular concern would have been the two little children she had been forced to leave behind in Naples, and the possibility that they would become victims of Ferrante’s antipathy for their father. It hard to imagine what would have happened to Eleonora if
Ercole had been killed or seriously injured in a war against her own father. Answers to these questions will be presented in this chapter, using evidence contained in several collections of letters in the Archivio di Stato in Modena.

Of particular interest has been the letters which Ercole’s private secretary, Paolo Antonio Trotti, wrote to Eleonora from the Florentine camp in Tuscany. While these letters have been consulted previously, this has always been from the standpoint of their contribution to the military and diplomatic history of the Pazzi War. Certainly, they have never been examined for what they might reveal about Eleonora’s response to the situation she faced during the months of her first regency, when her husband was engaged in a largely inconclusive campaign against the papal and royal army commanded by her brother, Alfonso. My analysis of Trotti’s letters will reveal that, although Eleonora’s loyalty to Ercole and his state never faltered, she was unhappy about the war, and about the part he had chosen to play in it.

As the war entered its final phase in August 1479, Ercole wrote a number of autograph letters to his young wife, making no secret of his deep affection for her and confirming that any differences they may have had over the path he had chosen in this war had done nothing to diminish his love for her and his trust in her ability. It was only as serious attempts were being made to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, towards the end of 1479, that evidence emerged that for some time Eleonora had been under considerable pressure from her father to persuade Ercole to abandon the Florentine alliance and his condotta as its commander-in-chief, and that she had rejected those demands on the grounds of Ercole’s honour and his personal safety. An analysis of two independent sets of instructions that accompanied their personal envoy, Brandelise Trotti, on his mission to the duke of Calabria in November 1479, will illustrate that,

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while Ercole believed that peace was dependent on a reconciliation between Ferrante and Lorenzo de Medici, Eleonora was at pains to justify her husband’s choices in the war and to restore harmony between Ercole and her father. I will suggest that Ercole’s instructions first to Brandelise Trotti and later to his secret agent, Niccolò Sadoleto, paved the way for Lorenzo de’ Medici to undertake his personal peace mission to Ferrante in Naples in December 1479.

**Origins of the conflict**

On 22 November 1474 the alliance of Venice, Milan and Florence, to which Carafa had referred so dismissively in his letter to Ercole on 25 October that year, had been formalized, with an invitation extended to Naples, the Papacy and Ferrara to join.\(^4\) Only Ercole had accepted, announcing his membership of the alliance publicly in Ferrara on 14 February 1475.\(^5\) Sixtus IV had actively rejected the invitation, with the claim that, as “the universal father of all,” he should belong to no particular alliance.\(^6\) However, Clough alone provides evidence that Federigo da Montefeltro, a condottiere for Naples since 1451, spent a considerable amount of time in both Rome and Naples in the middle of 1474, and that during that time a new league had been formed between the Papacy and Naples. Sixtus had created Federigo a papal duke, and made him Gonfaloniere of the Church and commander-in-chief of the new league on 23 August 1474.\(^7\) Federigo was also in Rome when Ferrante visited there between January and February 1475, ostensibly for the papal Jubilee, but the extreme secrecy of the latter part of the king’s

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\(^4\) See above, Chapter 4. 204 and 206.
\(^5\) Caleffini, 102.
\(^6\) This was in a letter to Ludovico Gonzaga on 11 April 1475; see Setton, 1:325.
visit suggests that his motives were political rather than religious.  

Fubini is convinced of Ferrante’s involvement in the conspiracy to assassinate Lorenzo and Giuliano de’ Medici, noting the presence in Naples of the exiled Baroncelli brothers, who later took part in the assassination attempt. Ferrante had also supported Sixtus’s appointment of a Pazzi relative, Francesco Salviati, as Archbishop of Florence, over a candidate proposed by the Medici, who had long sought to have a “cardinale protettore” in Rome. While Sixtus had acceded to Lorenzo’s wishes to the extent of replacing Salviati with Rinaldo Orsini, Lorenzo’s brother-in-law, he refused to make Orsini a cardinal. Ferrante had also supported Sixtus’s appointment of Salviati as Archbishop of Pisa in October 1474 and in August 1475 invited the Pope to confer the bishopric of Sarno in the Regno on one of Jacopo de’ Pazzi’s nephews, Antonio di Piero Pazzi. This had inspired Lorenzo to write to Galeazzo Maria Sforza on 7 September 1475, accusing the Pazzi of plotting against him in Florence, and suggesting that they were being encouraged by Ferrante and Federigo da Montefeltro. Federigo’s hatred for Lorenzo had been revealed in a letter, dated 13 July 1475, from the Milanese ambassador in Naples, Francesco Maletta, to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, in which Maletta described Federigo’s vitriolic outburst against the privileges which Ferrante had conceded to the Medici Bank in Naples, referring to Lorenzo as “uno vile mercatante” [a vile merchant], whom Ferrante should “cazarlo de Fiorenza o farlo tagliare a peze” [hunt him from Florence and have him cut to pieces].

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8 The alliance between Ferrante and Sixtus was not formalised until 27 March 1478 when a tripartite pact between Naples, Sixtus IV and Sixtus’s nephew, Girolamo Riario, was signed in Riario’s “secret” chamber in the Apostolic Palace; see Dover, “Royal Diplomacy,” 72; Medici, Lettere, 2:469.
11 Medici, Lettere, 2:123.
12 Medici, Lettere, 2:117. A letter in code, dated 14 February 1478, from Montefeltro to his ambassadors in Rome, exposes the duke’s involvement in the assassination plot; see Marcello Simonetta, “Federico da
Reactions to the Pazzi Conspiracy

A strange account in an anonymous fifteenth-century Parmense diary suggests that Ercole d’Este’s decision, to oppose his father-in-law in the conflict that followed the attempted assassination of Lorenzo de’ Medici on 26 April 1478, may have had its origins in Eleonora’s visit to Naples in the previous year:

Mirabantur multi, quod dux Hercules Extensis, qui erat gener regis Ferdinandi se apponeret contra ipsum regem. Nec mirum; nam idem dux fatuus fuisset tantam capitaneatus dignitatem abdenegare, quam quispiam alius de genere suo non est assecutus, nec simile. Preterea rex idem voluerat medio filie sue, uxoris dicti ducis, illum venenare, quod ipsa veniens anno curso Neapoli manifestavit; et dum in’ castris Florentinis foret extate proxime preterita, iterum temptavit illius occisionem. His igitur de causis dux ipse in socerum animosior factus est, inter quos extitit simper benivolentia [Many people were surprised that Duke Ercole d’Este, who was the son-in-law of King Ferdinand, aligned himself against him. There was nothing surprising about this: the duke would have been foolish to refuse such an important captaincy, the like of which none of his line ever achieved, nor anything similar. Moreover, the King himself had wanted, by means of his daughter, to poison him as she herself revealed when she returned from Naples the year before. And when he (Ercole) was in the Florentine camp last summer, (the King) again looked for a way to have him killed. For these reasons the Duke became more hostile towards his father-in-law].

While it is impossible to verify these claims, and the diarist was clearly no apologist for Ferrante, there appears to be no reason why he should include such a fiction in what is otherwise a superb and generally verifiable account of the military campaigns and diplomatic initiatives of the Pazzi War

On 12 May 1478, two weeks after the attempt on his life, Lorenzo had written to
the Florentine ambassador in Milan, Tommaso Soderini, insisting that there was cause for alarm: “Certificovi, che lo ho di buon luogo, che il conte Hieronymo cerca quanto può d’indurre il Re a romperci guerra, che il Papa v’è già indotto” [I assure you, and I have this on good authority, that Count Ieronimo (Riario) is trying as hard as he can to persuade the King to declare war on us, because he has already persuaded the Pope].  

Although both Ferrante and Diomede Carafa had expressed their displeasure at the events in Florence, in May 1478 Lorenzo told the Milanese ambassador in Florence, Filippo Sacramoro, that Ferrante “pareva dare dinari et mettere cum velocità in ordine de quelle sue gente” [appeared to be handing out money and organising his soldiers with haste].  

When it was revealed in May 1478 that up to 1500 men had been made ready in the Regno, the Signoria in Florence recommended that as many troops as possible be recruited to prepare the League to fight. On 4 June 1478 Sixtus excommunicated Lorenzo and the whole government of Florence, while Ferrante came out in strong support of the pope, threatening Florence with “a cruel war and total destruction, unless the Florentines expelled Lorenzo from their midst.”

**Ercole d’Este’s condotta**

The Ferrarese diarist, Zambotti, reported in June 1478, that Ercole d’Este was making his own preparations for the possibility of war:

De questo mexe fu facta la crida che ciascheduna persona che havesse cavali, li dibia dare in nota al maestro di stalla de la Excellentia del duca nostro, chè ge saràno pagati. 
Se dice che soa signoria vole fornire li soi homini d’arme, perchè hè necessario vada a Fiorenza a defenderla, perchè el Papa e lo Re de Napoli la vole pilgiare; ma Veneciani

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15 Medici, *Lettere*, 3: 26, n. 7
17 Martines, 177. On 14 June 1478 Ferrante nominated commissioners to oversee the confiscation of all property belonging to Lorenzo and his associates; see Medici, *Lettere*, 3: 75, n. 2.
e lo duca de Milano la vole defendere, e perhò se fa molte provixione [In this month the decree was published that anyone who had horses should give a note of them to the Master of His Excellency the Duke’s stables, and they will be paid for them. It is said that His Lordship wishes to supply his knights, since he has to go to Florence to defend her, because the Pope and the king of Naples intend to seize her; but the Venetians and the duke of Milan want to defend her, and therefore many preparations are being made].

As early as May 1478, the Florentine Signoria had suggested to both Milan and Venice that Ercole d’Este should be trusted to support the triple alliance in any future war against the royal and papal alliance, despite the potential conflict of interest caused by his family connections. In a letter dated 10 June 1478, the Florentine envoy, Tommaso Soderini, who was en route to Venice, was asked to detour to Ferrara and to make every effort to confirm Ercole in his support for Lorenzo and Florence. On 13 June 1478, Ercole himself wrote to his ambassador in Milan, Galeotto Bevilacqua, insisting that “era dispositissimo como li altri et che faria tutto quello che li altri” [he was just as well-disposed as the other (members of the Alliance), and that he would do everything that the others will do], to the end that, “non gli (Lorenzo) mancheremo mai per ogni nostra opera de quello ni sia possibile” [we will never fail him, doing everything that is within our power to do]. The Ferrarese ambassador in Florence, Battista Bendidio, wrote to Lorenzo on 17 June 1478, confirming “la bona disposition de questo mio Illustrissimo Signore verso lei” [the good disposition of My Most Illustrious Lord towards you].

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18 Zambotti, 52.
19 The letter stated: “Se farete la via da Ferrara, non bisogna v’insegni quel che sia da dire a quel Signore, per mantenerlo nella buona disposition che mostra havere verso di noi” [If you go by way of Ferrara, there is no need to tell you what you are to say to that lord, in order to keep him in the good disposition which he shows himself to have towards us]; see Medici, Lettere, 3:60.
20 Medici, Lettere, 3:95, n. 10.
21 Medici, Lettere, 3:60, n. 11. Caleffini reported Soderini’s arrival in Ferrara, on 12 June 1478. He was travelling to Venice, ostensibly to congratulate the recently elected Doge, but also to inform Venice “che’ fiorentini molto se temono del re Ferdinando, re de Napoli, et del papa Sisto 4; et de proximo se spectano la guerra a casa” [that the Florentines greatly fear King Ferrante, king of Naples, and Pope Sixtus IV; and soon they expect there will be war on their own soil]; see Caleffini, 293.
It was on 22 June 1478 that Lorenzo suggested to Girolamo Morelli in Milan that Ercole d’Este was a possible capitano generale of the League: “Per quanto mi scripse messer Tommaso [Soderini] a questi di et per aviso ho da Vinegia, a cotesti illustissmi Signori parrebbe che il duca di Ferrara fussi capitano della Legha” [From what Messer Tommaso wrote to me in recent days and from the advice I have from Venice, it would appear to those most illustrious lords that the duke of Ferrara might be captain of the League].

Soderini himself had suggested to the Milanese ambassador that, “lo essere povera de capi et homini de conditione diminuisse assai l’auctorità et reputatione” [being poor in leaders and men with status would greatly diminish (the League’s) authority and reputation], and that it needed “uno capo de reputacione et digno de grande governo” [a leader with some reputation and capable of governing at a high level]. Eventually it was agreed that it would not be easy to obtain a leader who was “megliore né ’l più digno et apto ad questi presenti propositi” [better nor more worthy and suitable for these present purposes] than was the duke of Ferrara.

Although fears had been raised that the proposal to offer Ercole the condotta [contract] would not be received favourably by the Venetians, who were suspicious of Ercole’s conflict of interest as Ferrante’s son-in-law, on 7 August 1478, the Milanese ambassador, Giovanni Iacomo Simonetta, arrived in Ferrara to confirm Ercole as Captian General of the League.

Throughout August 1478, the question of Ercole’s remuneration as capitano generale of the League was hotly debated in letters which passed between Florence and Milan. The amount varied from Milan’s initial offer of 25,000 ducats in time of peace and 40,000 ducats in time of war, to their final offer of 40,000 ducats in peacetime, to be

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22 Medici, Lettere, 3: 94.
23 Medici, Lettere, 3: 95, n. 10.
raised to 60,000 during war.\textsuperscript{25} When Milan’s last offer was rejected by Ercole and talks with the Florentine negotiator broke down in Ferrara, Lorenzo de’Medici himself assumed the task, making a personal appeal to Ercole on 27 August 1478, assuring him that “me reputarò obligatissimo per tucti li tempi dela vita mia quando vederò che la Excellentia se ne venga per la diffesa nostra liberamente” [I will consider myself deeply obligated for the rest of my life, if I see that Your Excellency comes to our defence freely].\textsuperscript{26} Ercole had apparently been so affected by Lorenzo’s personal appeal, that he had accepted the condotta unconditionally.\textsuperscript{27} When he arrived in Florence on 7 September 1478, the terms of his condotta had still not been finalized. Lorenzo again personally took over the negotiations and finally an agreement was reached, by which Ercole was to provide 400 uomini d’arme [men-at-arms or knights] and 300 provisionati [paid soldiers] in time of war, but only the 300 uomini d’arme in peacetime.\textsuperscript{28} On the question of Ercole’s stipend, his secretary, Paolo Antonio Trotti, wrote to Eleonora, from Tuscany on 10 September 1478 that, rather than being forced to return to Ferrara empty-handed, he had decided to accept the Milanese offer of 40,000 ducats in time of peace and 60,000 in time of war, but, according to a secret clause, only

\textsuperscript{25} Medici, \textit{Lettere}, 3: 177–8, n. 5. Mallett explains the practice whereby the military leader undertook to maintain certain forces in readiness in peacetime and to increase these to war-time levels when called upon. One such leader was Ludovico Gonzaga, marquis of Mantua, who, as Lieutenant General of Milan, kept 1,300 cavalry on stand-by, and was expected to increase those to 3,000 in war-time; see Michael Mallett, \textit{Mercenaries and their Masters} (London: Bodley Head, 1974), 118.

\textsuperscript{26} Medici, \textit{Lettere}, 3: 191.

\textsuperscript{27} Medici, \textit{Lettere}, 3: 191.

\textsuperscript{28} Medici, \textit{Lettere}, 3: 208. Mallett writes that at this time the term provisionati was applied to conscripted and paid militiamen under the command of professional infantry constables. They could be called out for full-time service in an emergency and otherwise for periodic training sessions; see Mallett, \textit{Mercenaries}, 114.
if Venice was a contributing member of the alliance. The condotta, stipulated for the period of three years, named Ercole as capitano e luogotenente generale of the League.

Describing Ercole’s triumphal entry into Florence on 6 September 1478, the Ferrarese diarist, Zambotti, claimed that the question of the duke’s relationship to the enemy was not a problem for the Florentines, “confidandose de la soa integritade” [as they trust in his integrity]. Because of his membership of the League of Milan, Florence and Venice, Ercole had been bound by a sacred oath to go to their aid if they were threatened with attack. He appears never to have considered the possibility of declaring his neutrality in this war on account of his relationship with the enemy, although Guerra suggests that such a move would have been counterproductive for both Venice and Milan, for whom Ferrara provided an effective physical buffer against attack from the south (Appendix, Map 1). She also claims that one of the conditions of neutrality was that troops of warring states would be allowed free transit through the neutral territory, which suggests that Ercole’s state would have become a thoroughfare for both opposing armies, while his territories would have been denuded of all livestock, crops and fuel by pillaging troops. It may therefore be argued that Ercole had little choice but to fulfill his military obligations to the League, although, as Ferrante would later argue, he had no need to actively seek and accept the condotta as its capitano generale.

29 ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Florence, 10 September 1478. The public version of the condotta, which was based on the inclusion of Venice, allowed Ercole an additional 10,000 ducats in times of both peace and war (50,000 and 70,000 ducats respectively), sparing him some loss of face.
30 Medici, Lettere, 3:208. Mallett writes: “In most states the rank of captain general implied supreme command over all troops with wide jurisdictional powers over them, the right to issue safe conducts, and the right to negotiate with the enemy and thus participate in political activity. A less common and more indefinable title was that of lieutenant general. In Milan the lieutenant general was the deputy of the duke and exercised very wide powers over civilians as well as soldiers; he seems to have presided over the whole military organisation in which considerable civilian involvement was necessary, and to have been superior to the captain general who commanded the army in the field.”; see Mallet, Mercenaries, 121.
31 Zambotti, 54.
32 Guerra, Soggetti, 37, n. 54
While Ercole’s active canvassing of the *condotta* may be seen as insensitive in light of his close familial relationship with the enemy, the financial rewards that would accrue from such a position would be a serious consideration. The fierce debates which had raged between the members of the League over the size of his *soldo* [salary], give some clue to the financial imperatives which drove both professional soldiers and warrior princes alike to contest such *condotte.*33 These salaries were for a fixed period, and the fact that they also applied in times of peace, albeit at a reduced level, meant that they contributed to the upkeep of the prince’s private army, which he needed to maintain to safeguard the security of his own state.34 Bestor suggests that Ercole’s acceptance of the League’s *condotta*, despite his relationship with Naples, must be seen “in the context of his continual indebtedness and the high cost of maintaining soldiers.”35 When the Pazzi War began in September 1478, Ercole had not been engaged in warfare since his *condotta* with Venice 1467, during which he had sustained the injury to his right foot which would later cause him to walk lame and even take to his bed for considerable periods. In view of that injury, it is surprising that Ercole was able to sustain the physical commitment demanded by the *condotta*. Indeed, as the war dragged on interminably into the second half of 1479, Ercole’s sense of weariness is palpable in his letters to Eleonora.36

33 These disagreements even threatened to sabotage Ercole’s carefully orchestrated investiture in Tuscany on 28 September 1478; see Guerra, *Soggetti*, 259–65.
34 Clough estimates that, during his long and successful career as the *condottiere* of both Naples and the Papacy, Federico da Montefeltro had amassed a vast fortune, “to become probably the wealthiest prince on the Italian peninsula by the early 1470s,” enabling him to finance an ambitious building program in his state of Urbino; see Clough, “Federico da Montefeltro,” 148–49.
36 Ercole reported to Eleonora from Milan in October that he was having problems with his foot but suggested that “se’l mio pede non guariria cosi presto per questo, avero pacienza che poi guariria quando so’a casa” [if my foot does not get better as quickly because of this, I will have to be patient then that it will get better when I’m at home]; see ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Milan, 11 October 1479. Caleffini reports that he was sick in November, adding in December 1479 that: “in questo tempo il duca nostro non se movea, et pocho usciva de casa” [in this period, our duke did not move about, and he rarely left the house; see Caleffini, 317–18.
The Secretary’s letters

A major resource for the study of the couple’s private feelings about the war with Naples and the Papacy is a collection of letters written to Eleonora by Paolo Antonio Trotti, Ercole’s private secretary, who had travelled with the duke to the Florentine camp in September 1478. This important collection, conserved in the Archivio di Stato in Modena, has largely escaped notice because of its inappropriate filing among routine ambassadorial dispatches from Florence.37 These letters are a vital key to an understanding of Eleonora’s state of mind during the Pazzi War, as Trotti wrote long, detailed and often intensely private letters to her, primarily to keep her informed about her husband’s physical and mental state, but also to give her the support she craved as she confronted her first regency and came to terms with the repercussions of Ercole’s role in the war. All are in Trotti’s own hand, as befits his role as the duke’s private secretary, and their sensitive contents suggest that they were not intended for the eyes of others. It can only be surmised that Ercole had established a secure route by which they could be conveyed to Ferrara, without the risk of falling into enemy hands.

Paolo Antonio Trotti was a member of the hugely influential Ferrarese family which provided several other members to the service of Ercole and Eleonora. Although officially referred to as Ercole’s primo [principle] secretary, he is described, somewhat mysteriously, by Caleffini as “più che compagno del duca” [more than the duke’s companion].38 His letters to Eleonora are intensely personal, suggesting that he had the

37 ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letters from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, 3 September–5 December 1478.
38 The diarist, Ondedio da Vitale paints a delightful word picture of Paolo Antonio: “questo era homo piccolo, asuto, faza picola, asai domestico e serviciale” [this man is short, dessicated, with a small face, very friendly and helpful]; see Ondedio, f. 5r. Caleffini described Paolo Antonio’s brothers: Giacomo Trotti “mai se partiva da madama” [never left Madama’s side], Brandelise Trotti was her “magistro camerero” [chief steward], while Galeazzo Trotti seemed to do little but make money; see Caleffini, 310. One senses that Caleffini greatly disliked these four Trotti brothers, who had enormous influence over Ercole and Eleanora and their households until the ducal couple bowed to popular demand in November.
duke’s complete trust and that in return he was totally devoted to both Ercole and Eleonora, seeing it as his duty to guide and support each of them through the many difficulties presented by this war. Trotti’s letters also reveal Eleonora’s dependence on him for advice on a wide variety of, often controversial, issues as she dealt with the day-to-day administration of Ercole’s state and the issues arising out of her own close relationship to the enemy. He is never slow to give her that advice or to reassure her of Ercole’s affection for her, even when that affirmation is not forthcoming from the duke himself. Although there are textual references in Trotti’s letters to those that Eleonora wrote to Ercole in her own hand, none of them appears to have survived. A small collection of Ercole’s letters to her does exist, brief and business-like communications, dictated to Trotti, whose signature appears in the bottom right hand corner.

Trotti’s letters to Eleonora provide an amazingly vivid view of the first campaign of the Pazzi War, a period when constant diplomatic activity suggested there was still hope for the peaceful outcome which Eleonora so obviously desired.

The first of these letters was sent on 3 September 1478, two days after Ercole had left Ferrara with members of his household, his men-at-arms, infantry and paid soldiers, bound for Modena. The first issue raised was Sigismondo d’Este’s failure to produce the fifty men-at-arms he’d promised in order to fulfill the Ercole’s commitment of 1482 and they were banished. Zambotti writes of Paolo Antonio’s disgrace: “Polo Antonio Trotto, primo secretario del duca nostro, quello il quale faceva tutto quello ge pareva, se parti da Ferrara accompagnato da 20 balestreti a caval, per paura de non essere amazato dal populo, il quale hera malvoluto per la sua crudeltade, che non curava de alchuno” [Paolo Antonio Trotti, our duke’s chief secretary, who did whatever he wanted, left Ferrara, accompanied by 20 archers on horseback, because he feared he would be killed by the people, because he was hated for his cruelty and he cared for no one]; see Zambotti, 120.

That such letters did exist is confirmed by Trotti’s infamous letter of 7 September 1478 to Eleonora, in which he begs her not to write in her own hand as her writing is so difficult to read; see ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Florence, 7 September 1478. See also the letter of 23 September 1478; ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Poggio Imperiale, 23 September 1478.

For Ercole’s dictated letters to Eleonora; see ASMo, Carteggio de principi, Casa e Stato, busta 67, letters from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, September–November 1478.

Zambotti, 54; ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, San Almasio, 3 September 1478.
troops to the League’s army. This had left Ercole “desperato e mal contento” [desperate and discontented], and he had complained to Trotti: “Io son sta’ spinto da casa cum promesse de mandarme dricte subito quisti 50, che som spazati già due misi fa, et mo son tractato da babione” [I was urged to leave home with promises that these fifty men would be sent straight after me, and that they were despatched two months ago, and now I am being treated like an idiot]. Although Trotti had urged him to be patient, Ercole’s anger was justifiable: the shortfall in troops would make it difficult for him to prosecute the war effectively and it had the capacity to arouse suspicions in the Florentines that he was not fully committed to their cause because of his relationship with the enemy, thus “parturire qualche scandalo” [creating a scandal]. The ongoing question of Sigismondo’s inability, or unwillingness, to leave Ferrara with his share of Ercole’s troop commitment, was a constant topic of many of Trotti’s letters to Eleonora from Tuscany.\(^{42}\)

Sigismondo and his troops were no closer to leaving Ferrara when Trotti next wrote to Eleonora on 7 September, but of more concern was the recalcitrance of the Venetians.\(^{43}\) Reproving her for not opening letters to Ercole from their ambassador in Venice, he assured her that: “il Signore vole che intendiati et sapiati ogni cosa perché haveresti bene inteso a compimento se venetiani sono ribaldi et quanto odio portano al duca vostro” [My Lord wants you to find out and know everything, because in the end you must be aware if the Venetians are rogues and how much they hate your duke].\(^{44}\)

\(^{42}\) Guerra suggests that Sigismondo had every reason to expect to remain in Ferrara as Ercole’s regent, since, up until that point, that had been the case. In the event of Ercole’s death in battle, it would have been Sigismondo who assumed the regency, continuing in that role until Ercole’s heir reached his majority. Ercole had departed from that model when he decided to take Sigismondo, and their half-brother, Rinaldo, with him to Tuscany, thus giving Eleonora her first opportunity to act as his regent; Guerra, *Soggetti*, 252–55. See also Bestor, “Kinship”, 224.

\(^{43}\) AsMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Firenze, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Florence, 7 September 1478.

\(^{44}\) This is a reference to the Venetian refusal to commit troops to the war, using the excuse that they were still at war with the Turks, but in reality it was because they opposed Ercole’s election as captain of the League’s army; see Guerra, *Soggetti*, 264–65.
Trotti ended this letter on a note of praise and encouragement for Eleonora’s performance as regent, telling her how much Ercole appreciated what she was doing on his behalf and assuring her of the duke’s real affection for her:

Io ho dicto al Signore che adesso il conosce la valuta et governo vostro, et che beato lui et casa sua che lo habia gratia de havere Vostra Signoria per moglie. Il dice che ‘l non è stato pur adesse ad intenderlo e tanto s’è contento de Vostra Signoria che mai non la nomina che non li venga le lacrime ali ochii’ [I have spoken to My Lord so that now he knows the value of your government, and how blessed he and his house are to have the good fortune of having Your Ladyship for a wife. He says that he has not just now discovered this, and he is so happy with Your Ladyship that he never says your name without tears springing into his eyes].

Trotti’s letters of 10, 14 and 17 September 1478 were much preoccupied with Ercole’s continuing difficulties with having the terms of his condotta confirmed by the representatives of Milan and Venice.\(^45\) In the third of these letters, Trotti reiterated his earlier praise of Eleonora, acknowledging her love for Ercole and her loyalty, and encouraging her to be strong and to persevere:

Ma li portamenti de Vostra Signoria sono tali et pieni de tanto amore et carità et de tanto fervore che la non poteria errare in cossa alcuna et dio volesse che la potesse uldire ale fiate quello che il Signore et io ragionamo de li facti vostri et de lo amore che portati ad Sua Excellentia et dela valuta et inteligentia vostra. Ma creditime Madama mia che como più fiate ho dicto a Vostra Signoria l’era de bisogno che lo accadesse questa opportunitade a Vostra Signoria perché altramente mai la non seria stata cognosciuta. Si che non siati mal contenta che queste cosse siano accadute perché certamente l’è stato il facto vostro [But such is Your Ladyship’s behaviour, so full of love and charity and so much passion, that you cannot err in any thing and I wish to God you could sometimes hear what my Lord Duke and I say about you, about the love which you bear His Excellency, about your worth and your intelligence. But, believe me, My Lady, that, as I have said many times to Your Ladyship, it was necessary that this opportunity fall to Your Ladyship as otherwise it would never have been known. So don’t be unhappy that

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\(^{45}\) AsMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letters from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Florence and the Florentine camp at Poggio Imperiale, 10, 14 and 17 September 1478.
these things have happened because certainly it has been the making of you].

In this passage Trotti is at his most persuasive as he tries to shore up Eleonora’s morale and strengthen her resolve to face the challenges of her regency and the war with Naples. It suggests very strongly that Eleonora was very unhappy and that she had been expressing serious misgivings about the war to Trotti. He is now at pains to convince her that “it’s an ill wind that blows nobody good,” and that she should seize the opportunity that the war, and Ercole, have given her to demonstrate her capacity to rule Ferrara.

On 23 September 1478, Trotti alluded to a letter in which Eleonora had described the tears that she had shed while writing to him, such was her sadness at being separated from her Ercole. Although this letter no longer exists, Trotti’s reply gives some sense of the intense feelings of loneliness and isolation she had expressed in that letter, feelings she had had to endure alone since Ercole’s departure from Ferrara. The secretary needed to draw upon his own considerable skill with words as he tried to assure Eleonora of how much she is loved and appreciated, not only by Ercole, but by Trotti himself, who described himself as continually dissolving into tears at the mere mention of her name. Clearly the very embodiment of Carafa’s perfect courtier, “la sua passione vole essere in sollicitudine et ben servire in suo offitio lo Signore” [whose passion must be sollicitude and his duty to serve his Lord Duke well], Trotti even had to act as Ercole’s mouthpiece in conveying to Eleonora the duke’s most intimate feelings for her, feelings which Ercole apparently had difficulty expressing for

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46 ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Poggio Imperiale, 17 September 1478.
47 ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Poggio Imperiale, 23 September 1478.
himself. While Trotti’s words indicate the degree of the intimacy and trust that had developed between the duke and himself, and also, by implication, the influence which he might exercise over Ercole’s decision-making, the question must be asked why Ercole was not writing these things himself? Was he so occupied with diplomatic and military matters that he had no time for letter-writing? Or did he need the pen of a wordsmith like Trotti because he was unable to express his own emotions? From the poetry of his words of encouragement to Eleonora, Trotti clearly did not have such a problem:

Se la Vostra Signoria me ha scripto la littera de sua mano de di xviii de questo cum molte lacrime, crediti che anche la non è letta senza. Se bene lo officio de li homini è de non piangere, pure lo amore che se porta a Vostra Signoria et le dolce et amorevole parole che la scrive per epsa littera moveriano li sassi. Ma questo ve voglio dire per la veritate che ne siti molto bene recambiata de ogni amore che portati al Signor Duca vostro et anche a tuti nui et guiro a dio che mai non vi nomino cum il Signor Duca che le lacrime non mi cadano da li occhi et in public quando li sono quisti Signori ambassaturi et altri conducteri del campo ala presentia del Signor che ne accade speso in qualche bono proposito nominarvi siti cagione de vergognarme che non posso tener le lacrime [If Your Ladyship’s letter to me, in your own hand, on 19th of this month was written with many tears, believe me that it was not read without them either. Although it behoves men not to cry, yet the love which he bears for Your Ladyship and the sweet and loving words which you write in this letter would move the stones. But I want to say this to you in truth, that all the love you bear towards your Lord the Duke and to all of us is fully reciprocated, and I swear to God I never mention your name when I am with My Lord that the tears do not fall from my eyes, and in public, when these gentlemen, ambassadors and other commanders from the camp are in my Lord’s presence, when it often happens that your name is mentioned for some good purpose, you have every reason to be ashamed of me for not being able to hold back the tears].

Trotti then alluded to the fact that Eleonora had expressed the hope that there might still

49 This is further confirmation of Arrivabene’s description of Ercole as “non de molte parole” [a man of few words]; see Chap. 4, n. 32.
50 Trotti’s influence over Ercole is described by Ondedio da Vitale in 1471: “A questo tempo chanceliero, secretario primo era uno nominato Paulo Antò di Troti, cetadino de Ferrara, e questo podeva con lo duca quello che voleva” [At this time the chancellor and principal secretary was a man named Paulo Antonio Trotti, a citizen of Ferrara, and this man could do what he wanted with the duke]; see Ondedio, f. Sr.
be a peaceful solution to this dispute, a feeling that he appeared to share. Although there are no documents to support any involvement by her in peace negotiations at this early stage, Trotti’s next words (my italics) suggest that peace talks were still taking place between the two sides, despite their continuing preparations for war:

Io non seria manco contento de Vostra Signoria che la pace seguisse aciò che potessimo tornare a casa como me scriva Vostra Signoria. Anche fiorentini ne restariano contenti et da Re et dal papa forsi non mancharia che tutti li disegni già ragionati fra noi havesseno luoco” [I would be no less content than Your Ladyship if peace were to follow, so that we could return home as Your Ladyship writes to me. Also the Florentines will be happy and perhaps the King and the Pope will not be absent so that all the plans already discussed amongst us should be put into action].

On 28 September 1478, Trotti was able to inform Eleonora that Ercole’s condotta was finally to be formalised and that the Milanese ambassador and Lorenzo had arrived at the Florentine camp as representatives of the League, in the noticeable absence of Venice, with the letters patent, “ad presentare il bastone et stendardo ad Sua Signoria cum grandissimo triumph” [to present the baton and standard (of the League) to His Lordship with the greatest triumph]. Since Sigismondo had still not arrived with the promised number of troops, a serious embarrassment for Ercole with implications for his own honour, Trotti revealed that he had been forced to lie to Lorenzo:

Crediteme, Madama mia, che essendo Messer Sigismondo de la natura che l’è et facendo come il fa, tanto è pegio per lui, pure che non li andasse lo honore del Signor et crediteme che tanto più fa’ pensare il Signor al facto suo, vostro et de’ vostri figlioli, che ogni cosa tornarà in fine al proposito nostro, se bene al presente se ne riceva gram carico. Io ho dicto hogi al Magnifico Laurentio, che me domandava de la sua venuta, che l’è in viazo, vergognandome a dire altramente” [Believe me, My Lady, with Messer Sigismondo being of the nature he is, and acting as he does, it’s all the worse for him, even though it does not directly involve My Lord ’s honour, and believe me, it makes my Lord Duke think so much more about his situation, and yours and your children’s, and everything will turn

51 ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Firenze, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Poggio Imperiale, 28 September 1478.
out right for us in the end, even though at the moment it’s a great burden. Today, I told the Magnificent Lorenzo, who asked me about his (Sigismondo’s) arrival, that he was on the way, being ashamed to say otherwise.

In his letter of 1 October 1478, Trotti alluded to the fact that Eleonora herself had become suspicious of Sigismondo’s intentions, referring to “la pocha volontà che pare a Quella habia il Signor Messer Sigismondo de venire in campo” [Your Ladyship’s perception that Messer Sigismondo has little will to come to the camp]. Writing again the following day, he let her know that he had shown the letter, in which she had expressed these suspicions, to Ercole, but that he had refused to hear any ill about his brother, “perché il se vergogna de intendere quello che li racordo che ’l doveria fare, ma il non ha altro male se non che l’è tropo bono” [because it embarrasses him to hear what I remind him he must do, but he has no other fault except that he is too good].

He wrote that a truce with the enemy had been decided upon, and that, during the break in hostilities, the two enemy commanders, the dukes of Calabria and Urbino, had suggested that it might be extended until the following March, that is, after the winter break. Trotti described the visit of Francesco, one of Ercole’s men, to the duke of Calabria’s camp, and reported that it had been his impression that, “pure se dole del Signor che li sia venuto contra, ma dice che’l ge ha dicto che il desideraria di aboccarsi cum el Signor nostro” [even though he is sorry that the lord Duke has come out against him, yet he (Francesco) says he (the duke of Calabria) told him that he would like to confer with our Lord Duke face to face]. Trotti’s response to that suggestion was direct: “ma non li vedo modo alcuno, perché al Signor bisogna essere tropo savio” [but I don’t

52 ASMo. Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Poggio Imperiale, 1 October 1478.
53 ASMo. Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Poggio Imperiale, 2 October 1478 (1).
see this happening in any way, because My Lord must be too wise for that].\textsuperscript{54} Ercole’s
close familial relationship with the enemy commander clearly required him to be
extremely circumspect in any dealings with him, lest he be accused of treachery by the
other members in the League. However, the Florentine diarist, Luca Landucci, was still
able to write that there were rumours afoot in Florence, “che’l nostro capitano non volle
vincere e che non faceva el dovere” [that our captain had no will to win and that he was
not doing his duty].\textsuperscript{55} This rumour appears to have been inspired by Ercole’s lack of
success in the field, which Guerra suggests was not caused by any lack of enthusiasm
on his part, but by a serious shortage of men due the failure of Sigismondo and Rinaldo
d’Este to fulfill their parts of his troop commitments.\textsuperscript{56}

Two postscripts were added to one of Trotti’s letters of 2 October 1478. The first
of these notes reveals that the duke of Calabria’s proposal to extend the truce had been
abandoned “per non havere arbitrio dal papa et da Re de poterlo fare” [because he has not
had the authority of the Pope and the King to do it]. The second note is of greater interest
as it refers to two letters, both to Eleonora, one from her younger brother, Francesco, and
the other from Diomede Carafa, that had been opened by Ercole as a precaution. The
duke was now asking her “che ’l scusati se l’à preso questa presumzione perché ’l ha
facto a segurtade et sonno qui allegate” [to excuse him for taking this liberty because he
did it for security reasons and they are attached here].\textsuperscript{57} More significant was Trotti’s
suggestion that Ercole had opened the letters “per intendere se li fosse stato cossa alcuna
de importanita al pertinente ad Sua Signoria” [to find out if there if there was anything
of importance relating to His Lordship]. Trotti did not explain just how these letters had

\textsuperscript{54} ASMo. Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to
Eleonora d’Aragona, Poggio Imperiale, 2 October 1478 (2).
\textsuperscript{55} Guerra, \textit{Soggetti}, 38
\textsuperscript{56} Guerra writes that Ercole was also known for the impetuous nature of his military exploits, making it
difficult for him to operate in the wars of attrition common in that time; see Guerra, \textit{Soggetti}, 38–39.
\textsuperscript{57} At this time Francesco d’Aragona was living in Hungary at the court of his sister, Beatrice; see
come into Ercole’s possession, although they had obviously been intercepted en route either to Ferrara or the duke of Calabria’s camp. This incident is the only time that there is a suggestion that Ercole had any suspicions about Eleonora’s loyalty, but Carafa’s letter does reveal that, to some extent at least, her lines of communication with Naples were still open. Consequently, Trotti was asking her to burn this letter once she had read it, or after she had shown to Messer Jacomo, “perché ho tanta paura che fiorentini non intendessino quello vi scrivo, ché sempre ne sta in fantasia” [since I’m afraid in case the Florentines find out about what I’m writing to you, because they’re always imagining things].

This is the clearest evidence yet that the Florentines were not completely convinced of the loyalty of their Ferrarese commander-in-chief and that they still harboured reservations about his real intentions towards the enemy.

Ercole’s problems with members of his own family were far from over. On 4 October 1478, Trotti wrote to Eleonora that the duke had received a letter from Alberto d’Este in Naples, in which the Ferrarese claimed that he was about to be expelled by Ferrante, “havendo il Signor preso il partito de la liga” [because My Lord has taken the League’s side].

He added that Alberto had responded to Ferrante’s threat by suggesting to him that he (Alberto) “credeva che la intentione del Signor Duca sua fratello fosse che partendosi lui menasse lo Illustrissimo Don Alvise vel Ferando” [believed that it was the intention of the Lord Duke, his brother, that, when he left, he should take the Most Illustrious Don Aloysius, or Ferrando, with him]. As there had
never previously been any mention of the possibility that the little boy might be allowed to return to Ferrara, this was clearly a clever move on Alberto’s part to ingratiate himself with Ercole.

On 6 October 1478, Trotti again raised the matter of Sigismondo and Rinaldo d’Este’s failure to arrive at the Florentine camp, this time adding that Ercole realised that the reason lay in his decision to appoint Eleonora as regent in Ferrara:

Il Signor dice che l’è piú che certo che ’l doglia e gravi in fino al cuore a Messer Sigismondo che siati intratta in questo governo et che se tutte le altre cosse gli arivasse mal facte ad havere presa la via de questo soldo che almeno lo ha facto il facto vostro et de’ vostri fioli perché il non li era mai via alcuna che se potesse pigliare che se vi potesse metere queste cosse in le mane, che non li fosse stato da dire et da fare assai se non questa de che il se ne contenta tropo et crediti che io non mai dormo a fare il debito mio et voria che me oldisti ale fiate et basta.” [My Lord says that he is more than certain that it grieves and pains Messer Sigismondo to the bottom of his heart that you have taken over this government, and that, if everything else were to go badly for him (Ercole) for having accepted this commission, at least he did it for you and your children, since there was never any way that he could have taken it on without entrusting these things to your hands, and this is the only thing he could ever have said or done, and he is very glad of it. And, believe me, I’ll never sleep while I do my duty, and I wish could hear me sometimes, and that is enough].

Trotti never tired in his determination to support Eleonora’s morale as she dealt with the challenges of her regency, urging her to have confidence in her own intelligence and in her ability to fulfill Ercole’s commission, reminding her that she had been brought up with both the expectation and the ability to rule. At no time did Trotti’s faith in her

Alberto Maria had written to Ercole about the child on 16 June 1478: “Li vostri Illustrissimi fioliti stano benessimi, et è pur tanto bello don Ferrante, che ’l pare uno angelo de paradiso. Io priego l’omnipotente dio che presto mi concorra gratia de vederlo ne lo brazo del patre aciò possa fare vedere Vostra Excellenza se ’l serà stato vero o busia quello che per mie tante lettere gia havèro scripto de questo mio picolino Signore” [Your Most Illustrious children are very well, and also Don Ferrante is so beautiful that he seems like an angel from Paradise. I pray to the Almighty God that soon He may grant me grace to see him in the arms of his father so that I can show Your Excellency if what I have written about my tiny Lord in so many of my letters has been true or false]; ASMo, Casa e Stato, busta 130, autograph letter from Alberto Maria d’Este to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 16 June 1478.

ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Colle Val d’Elsa, 6 October 1478.
appear to be compromised by the fact that she was Ferrante’s daughter.

Sigismondo finally left Ferrara on 11 October, “cum circa 200 cavali et cento staferi, ogni homo bene armati et cum lanze et balestre” [with about 200 horses and a hundred grooms, every man well armed with lances and bows], to be followed a week later by his brother, Rinaldo. Although Trotti’s letter of 13 October 1478 is in a poor state of conservation, it is possible to discern that Ercole had not believed Alberto’s claim that he had been ordered out of Naples by Ferrante, or that he might be bringing the little boy with him. He had suggested that Eleonora should write to the duke of Calabria to discover the truth about Alberto’s claims, because Ercole himself, “per non metere suspecto a questi Signori fiorentini ha lassato de scriverli” [has stopped writing to him in order not to arouse the suspicions of these Florentine gentlemen]. Eleonora had apparently complained again to Trotti about Sigismondo’s attitude towards her before he left Ferrara, causing Trotti to repeat his belief that, “il Signor è più che certo che’l doglie fino al cuore a Messer Sigismondo che habiati preso in le mane il governo de tute le cosse del Signor” [My Lord is more than certain that what pains Messer Sigismondo to the bottom of his heart is that you have taken over the management of all His Lordship’s affairs], and to assure her that Sigismondo, “restarà anche pegio contento per quello che poterà et farà Vostra Signoria quando nui seremo a Ferrara che serano anche de magiore honore a Vostra Signoria, essendoli il Signor” [will be even less happy about what it is possible for Your Ladyship to do when we are in Ferrara, because there will be even greater honour shown to Your Ladyship when My Lord is there].

Trotti began his letter of 17 October 1478 by referring to Eleonora’s rather startling suggestion in a recent letter that she would like some ill to befall her brother so

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62 Caleffini, 300–01.
63 ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Colle di Val d’Elsa, 13 October 1478.
that Ercole might be able to return home. The secretary had been so moved by the obvious sincerity of her feelings that he had had the letter read to Ercole himself:

La ho facto legere al Signor ació che lo intenda quanto scriteti del male che voristi havesse il Signor duca de Calabria ació che Sua Signoria potesse tornare a casa, de che se n’è riso, ma ho voluto che lo intenda se quisti sono signi de amore gli porta Sua Signoria ho non? Che dio volesse che lui fosse cussi amorevole como è Vostra Signoria se bene certamente il demonstra non potere esser magiore [I had it read to My Lord, in order that he might hear what you write about the ill-fortune which you would like to befall the duke of Calabria, in order that His Lordship might return home. He laughed at this, but I wanted him to find out whether these are signs of the love that you bear his Lordship or not? I wish to God that he were as affectionate as is Your Ladyship, although he most certainly shows that his love for you could not be greater].

Trotti’s descriptions of Eleonora’s expressions of longing to be reunited with Ercole are reminiscent of her outpourings of similar emotions in her letters from Naples. It may be no coincidence that Eleonora was again four months’ pregnant when this letter was written, although her pregnancy had never been referred to by Trotti. While Eleonora’s ties to Ercole appeared to become stronger with the birth of each of her children, her pregnancies also exacerbated her feelings of vulnerability and her dependence on him.

After assuring Eleonora of the great care he was taking of “suo bene e del’animo e del corpo e anche del honore” [(Ercole’s)well-being in mind and body, and also his honour], Trotti suggested that he did not agree with him in all things, clearly referring to his own reservations about the stance the duke had taken in this war against her father:

como scia Vostra Signoria, l’è di natura che’l vole essere compiazzuto se uno ‘Si’ in ogni cossa, e io non sono messer Augustino ni messer Fiasco ni serò mai fino che io viva, e intravengo quello che se voglia et soprattuto solictita Sua Excellentia a trovare qualche partito per che segua pace aciòche’l desiderio de Vostra Signoria habia luoco [as Your Ladyship knows, his nature is that he likes to be agreed with in all things, and I am

64 ASMo, Cancellerìa, Ambasciatorìi, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Fossato Cucho, 17 October 1478.
65 On 30 March 1479 Eleonora gave birth to this child, a boy who was named Ippolito, possibly in honour of her sister-in-law, Ippolita Maria Sforza, possibly a sign of a rapprochement between them; see Ferrarini, 97; Caleffini, 306; Zambotti, 62.
neither (like) Messer Augustino nor Messer Fiasco, nor will I ever be as long I live, and I intervene when it is necessary and, above all, I am urging His Excellency to find a path which leads to peace, so that Your Ladyship’s wish will be fulfilled].

The secretary’s lack of respect for the more sycophantic members of Ercole’s household, who apparently never opposed their Lord on anything, and his suggestion that he was encouraging him to find a peaceful solution to the war, reveal just how much influence Trotti had, or thought he had, over Ercole’s decision-making.⁶⁶

He then warned her that Alberto was expected to arrive in Ferrara any day and that, if she had not heard from Ercole that he had his permission to be there, she should “il faciati incontinente pigliare e sbatere in uno fondo de tore” [have him seized at once and hurled to the bottom of the tower].⁶⁷ She should also keep a close eye on him, “aciò che non intravenisse qualche scandalo perché forsi il se meterià a farne ogni male quando il sapia che’l Signor non voglia che il venga a stare a Ferrara” [lest he should involve himself in some scandal, since he may set about doing every kind of evil when he learns that My Lord does not want him to remain in Ferrara].

On 20 October 1478, Trotti again expressed his desire for a peaceful outcome to the conflict, praising the dukes of Calabria and Urbino for suggesting an eight-day

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⁶⁶ Trotti’s reference to Messer Augustino and Messer Fiasco suggests that both these men were uncritical in their support for Ercole. Augustino di Bonfranceschi d’Arimino was one of Ercole’s original chief advisors and his most senior judge. He died in April 1479; see Caleffini, 13 and 306. Ludovico Fiasco was Ercole’s chamberlain. His wedding in May 1477 was paid for by the duke and attended by both Ercole and Eleonora; see Caleffini, 148 and 246–47. The Venetian polymath, Francesco Sansovino (1521–1586), described the relative importance of the secretary of a prince: “of the great secretaries some serve principalities, others republics. Those that serve princes have greater weight and more responsibilities than the others, whence as a result they are more esteemed and honoured in the world…And today the best governed courts make great capital of their secretaries, whence it has happened that sometimes the secretary has been elevated to become the prince of the Signoria”; see Douglas Biow, Doctors, Ambassadors, Secretaries: Humanism and Professions in Renaissance Italy (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 160.

⁶⁷ The Parmense diarist writes that after Ercole accepted the captain’s baton: “Rex Ferdinandus […] expullit de civitate Neapolis dominum Albertum Extensem fratrem suum, ibidem relegatam, credens ipsum iturum Ferrariam, ut populum faceret insurgere sibi amiciissimum contra dictum ducem, eumque recedere cogeret a talli impensa et dignitate capitaneatus. Sed spes sua eum fel Felicit” [King Ferdinand […] expelled Ercole’s brother, Alberto d’Este, from the city of Naples, to which he had been banished: the king thought that Alberto would go to Ferrara where he would raise up the people, who were deeply attached to him personally, against the Duke and would force him to give up both his course of action and his position as Captain. The King’s hopes came to nothing]; see Diario parmense, 33. Translation by David Fairservice.
truce, and adding, “spireo ch’il seguirà cossa che anche più piacerà a Vostra Signoria et ad suo contento li ho voluto dare questo adviso il quale per dio tenga secreto Quella” [I hope that something will happen that will please Your Ladyship even more and, for your peace of mind, I wanted to give you this advice, which for God’s sake Your Ladyship must keep secret]. Two days later, he wrote that the truce was now underway, although what he really hoped that it would be extended so that both sides might withdraw “ale stantie” [to their winter quarters], and Ercole might return to Ferrara.

Eleonora had apparently expressed her concern about Alberto’s suggestion that, “de quello mio Signorino che debia essere portato per quisti tempi” [my tiny Lord should be moved in these times]. Although Trotti maintained that Ferrante would never agree to such a thing, he was also irritated with Eleonora’s reaction and rebuked her: “per dio non ve ne meteti affano anzi pigliati ogni cossa per lo meglio; non bisogna che Vostra Signoria me dica qual sia lo amore de li patri verso li figlioli che ne scio e ne sento quello che se ne pote” [for God’s sake don’t worry yourself about this, rather see the best side of things; there’s no need for Your Ladyship to tell me about the love of parents for their children, because I know about it and I feel what it can do].

Writing again on 25 October 1478, he was able to reassure Eleonora that their fears about Alberto had been unfounded, as he had arrived in Tuscany and was seeking permission “a fare reverentia ad Sua Signoria” [to pay his respects to His Lordship]. Alberto’s first encounters with Ercole at the Florentine camp were the inspiration for a series of extraordinarily vivid narratives as Trotti attempted to evoke
the emotional intensity of the brothers’ reunion, writing that Alberto threw himself at
his brother’s feet, “cum molto sumissione senza parole” [with great humility and
without saying a word], whereupon the duke had raised him up and embraced him,
addressing him with a few terse words: “Come stati vui? Voi, ve siti levato molto per
tempo!” [How are you? Well you got out in just in time!]. Revealing that he was still
very angry with his brother, Ercole had immediately turned away to talk to Trotti,
saying: “Tiene pure imparole, perché non voglio che questui me parli fino che non
monto a cavallo” [Just keep talking because I don’t want this one to speak to me before
I get on my horse].

Trotti then related to Eleonora what had later passed between the brothers. Alberto
had told Ercole that, while Ferrante was unhappy that Ercole had decided to take the
side of the League against him, he was most angry that he had accepted “questo
mestiero” [this task], obviously referring to Ercole’s condotta as Captain General.
Ercole had responded angrily to that, saying that “ficce intendere più volte al conte de
Matalone che ’l non poteva stare cussì” [he’d told the count of Matalone (Carafa)
several times that things couldn’t stay the way they were]. Trotti wrote that he himself
had taken Alberto aside later to question him about “la mala contenteza de Sua Maestà
del Signor habia preso questo partito contra de lui” [His Majesty’s displeasure that
My Lord Duke has taken this course against him]. Alberto had then described Ferrante’s
feelings about his son-in-law’s actions:

se Sua Signoria voleva pure compiacere la liga, li doveva mandare le gente d’arme senza
venireli lui in persona e che’l va a pericolo che, per non se fidare quisti de la liga de lui
per essere suo genero, li poteriano per qualche suspeto meterli uno die la mano adosso
e farelì uno male servitio, havendolo essere in odio vinetiani, li quali meteriano sempre
al previsto contra de lui. Et che in fine se Sua Signoria se volesse adoperare per che’l
se facesse la pace che el ge ne faria honore [if His Lordship just wanted to satisfy the
League, he should have sent his troops without going there in person, and that he is
putting himself at risk, because since the members of the League do not trust him because
he is his (Ferrante’s) son-in-law, one day, because of some suspicion, they could seize him and do him some mischief, since the Venetians hate him and will always go against him as expected. If in the end His Lordship would do his best to make peace, then he (Ferrante) would make it worth his while.

This is the first time that Ferrante had announced his intention to persuade Ercole to abandon the Florentine cause and his leadership of the League’s army. If Ercole was willing to change sides in this war, or simply to make peace with Naples, Ferrante would make sure that it was to his son-in-law’s advantage.

Alberto then dropped a bombshell when he explained to Trotti why he had not been able to bring Ercole’s little son, Ferrante, with him when he left Naples:

> il Re per niente ge lo haveva voluto dare et che se lo voleva alevare e tenere per lui, e che ’l crede che quando il Signor mandasse per lui che forsi non ge’l daria et che’l fice ogni possibile instantia per haverlo” [the King had not wanted to give him up for anything and that he wanted to bring him up and keep him for himself, and that he believes that, when the Duke sends for him, perhaps he won’t give him up, and that he will make every possible effort to keep him].

Having raised for Eleonora the spectre of her little son as a hostage to Ercole’s role in the war, belatedly Trotti attempted to put her mind at rest, suggesting that her father’s refusal to let the child travel at such a dangerous time had shown that, “Sua Maestà habia havuto compassione a questa creatura e che ’l habia mostrato farne qualche extremo” [His Majesty has had pity on this little one and that he had only pretended to do him some serious harm]. He added that Alberto had been full of admiration for her little children, that “il putino è la più bella creatura che lui mai vedesse e che Madona Beatrice è la favorita de la regina” [the little boy is the most beautiful child he has ever seen and that Madonna Beatrice is the queen’s favourite].

Alberto had explained to Ercole that Ferrante had suggested that “lo haveva scripto male a Ferrara al duca nostro de Sua Maestà e de il duca de Calabria” [he (Alberto) had written to our duke in Ferrara, saying bad things about His Majesty and
the duke of Calabria], to which Ercole had replied that it could have been Giacomo
Acciaioli, who had informed Ferrante about what had been in Alberto’s letters. This
reference to the son of a Florentine (anti-Medicean) exile, who had become Eleonora’s
compagno [companion] by 1476, may have been a not-so-subtle warning to the duchess
that she needed to be more careful about her association with men known to be opposed
to the Medici.\footnote{Caleffini, 40, 156 and 247. He had accompanied Eleonora to Naples in 1477. Messer Agnolo Azaio\li is described among “li fuorausciti da Florence” [the exiles from Florence], who fought with Ercole against Florence at Molinella in 1467; see Diario ferrarese, 47 and n. 7. He had been part of a group which opposed the leadership of Piero de’ Medici in 1466; see Gene Brucker, Renaissance Florence (New York: Wiley, 1969), 258.}

The paradoxical nature of the war was highlighted by Trotti in his letter to Eleonora
on 29 October 1478.\footnote{ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, ex castris apud Civitella, 29 October 1478.} While the truce between the two armies was still in force, a
member of the duke of Calabria’s household had arrived at Ercole’s camp to buy “cavalli
non tropo grandi” [some quite small horses] for his Lord. Writing that this man had been
lodged at Ercole’s expense with Ercole’s own gentlemen, Trotti described how, before
returning to the enemy ca
\textit{mp}, he had bought a piece of cheese for Alfonso, “perché dice
gustarli più che’a cossa niuna” [because he (Alfonso) says he likes it more than anything
in the world]. Ercole had then given the man four more pieces of this cheese free of
charge, saying that they were a gift from him to the duke of Calabria, “ma che non li
voleva servire altramente” [but that he did not want to have anything else to do with
him]. Before the war, this cheese had apparently been regularly sent from Ferrara to
Naples, and Trotti had been told by Alfonso’s man that, “al presente lo voleva dala
Vostra Signoria in luoco del Signore” [now he (Alfonso) wanted it sent by Your
Ladyship instead of by the Lord Duke]. Trotti had replied that that would be no problem,
“perché vui eri Madona del Stato et dela roba et che ’l non fu mai Madona de Signor
alcuno che havesse tanta libertade et che lo dovesse dare al Signor duca et cussi a Dom
Federico per loro contento [because you will be the Mistress of the state and of all it has
and there has never been any ducal consort who has been so generous, and that you
would give it to the Lord Duke (of Calabria) and to Don Federigo for their enjoyment].

Trotti then highlights the incongruity of this war with his admission that he feels no
personal animosity towards Eleonora’s brother: “Io vedriò molto volontieri il duca de
Calabria se io potesse, ma il non me pare de poterli trovare partito alcuino” [I would very
much like to see the duke of Calabria if I could, but I can’t seem to find any way to do it].

The matter of Eleonora’s little boy in Naples was raised again in Trotti’s letter of
8 November 1478. While he wrote that both he and Ercole had agreed that Alberto had
been seeking to ingratiate himself with Ercole with the suggestion that he would be able
to remove the child from Naples, he revealed that one of Ercole’s men had recently been
told by Eleonora’s brother, Federigo, that “non ce ‘l dariano per niente e che lo voleno
per uno hostadice e cussì la puta” [they won’t give him up for anything and they want
him as a hostage, and also the little girl]. Then, in an attempt to soften the effect of this
hrash message, he added: “Madama, credetime che ogni picola cossa che sucedesse de
acordio reconciliaria vostro patre et fratelli cum il Signor perché il dice il proverbio che
‘fra la carne et l’ungia niuno li punza’” [Madama, believe me that every small thing that
would result in agreement will reconcile your father and brothers with my Lord Duke
because, as the proverb says, “Nothing stings between the flesh and the nail”].

On 16 November 1478, Trotti described the arrival at the Florentine camp of a

73 Eleonora’s brother, Federigo d’Aragona, was with the duke of Calabria in Tuscany; see Caleffini, 296.
The cheese was mentioned again in a postscript to Trotti’s next letter: “Del formazo, il Signor, quando
seremo a Ferrara, sarà contento il mandiati al Signor duca de Calabria perché poteriti havere li muli de
Sua Signoria per mandargelo e anche se mandarà il salamo dele anguille justa consuetudinem” [About the
cheese, when we are in Ferrara, the Lord Duke will be happy for you to send it to the Lord Duke of
Calabria, because you will be able to have His Lordship’s mules to take it to him and also we can send the
pickled eels just as usual].
74 ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to
Eleonora d’Aragona, ex castris apud Oliveto, 8 November 1478.
certain Messer Troiano, an emissary of the duke of Calabria, who had come to discuss with the Milanese representative, Giovanni Iacopo Trivulzio, “Io adaptamento de le cosse fra la maestà del Signor Re e la duchessa de Millano” [the resolution of issues between His Majesty the king and the duchess of Milan]. From these discussions it had emerged that “epsa Madona seria contenta de venere ad una bona pace cum Sua Maestà, ma questo non se poteria fare senza il contentamento del resto de li soi colligate [this Lady would be happy to reach a good peace with His Majesty, but this can’t be done without the agreement of the rest of her allies]. Trotti had started to observe the serious cracks appearing in the League, especially as the Venetians are unpopular with everyone, “per li mali portamenti et per la pocha demostracione li hano facto in questa guerra” [for their bad behavior and for their poor showing in this war]. Then, revealing how he really felt about Ercole’s allies:

Io digo tuto il di “Il diavolo a questi commissari fiorentini et milanesi!” De’ venetiani li qualli me tengono molto bene corda, et ne dicono septe tanta pegio de me, et io li dico però “Siti voi homo de pocho a non vi sapere togliere la Guerra da casa et caciarla a casa d’altri [I say all day “The Devil take these Florentine and Milanese commissaries!” Of the Venetians, who constantly keep me dangling, and who say things seven times worse about me, and yet I tell them “You’re not much use if you can’t get rid of a war at home, and can’t stop it in someone else’s house”].

On 27 November 1478, Trotti wrote that there was renewed talk that the troops were about to withdraw to their winter quarters. However, while Ercole would be returning to Ferrara, as punishment for their earlier recalcitrance, Sigismondo and Rinaldo would be staying behind in Tuscany for the winter.

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75 Troiano de Bottunis, a distinguished jurist and royal advisor whose long career with the Aragonese monarchy included being “auditore del re” [royal negotiator] in 1478–79; see Volpicella, Instructionum Liber, 286.

76 ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, ex castris, 16 November 1478.

77 Trotti is referring to their ongoing war against the Turks.

78 ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, ex castris, 27 November 1478.
Writing again two days later, Trotti confirmed that Ercole would soon be leaving Tuscany, “cum quisti soi cortesani che vano armati” [with those of his courtiers who bear arms], but that he intended to spend a couple of days in Florence on the way to Ferrara, “per sonare le campane adopo ali Signori X per farlo intendere che sonno homini da pocho e che non intendono il facto suo” [to put the wind up the War Council, telling them they are men of little consequence and that they don’t understand his situation].

Trotti’s final letter to Eleonora from Tuscany, written after their visit to Florence, was an opportunity for him to complain to Eleonora about a practical joke that Ercole had played on him while they were there:

Il Signor me ha gabato, perché in Fiorenza il me tene dui die suso la corda, dicendo che il voleva fare la via da Castelnovo de Garfignana, che era più longa che questa, forsi cento miglia, per forma che li dixi il diavolo, non solo una volta ma vinticinque, per modo che ’l se haveva tanto piacere de me che tuta Fiorenza il sapeva, perché io me ne condolevo cum ogni homo cum cui havevo amicitia. Et in fine il me dixi che ’l me haveva oxellato, per forma che hebi tanta alegreza de non fare quella via che ogni cossa ho soportato [My Lord teased me, because, for two days when we were in Florence, he kept me on tenterhooks, saying that he wanted to take the road from Castelnuovo di Garfagnana, which is longer than this way, perhaps by a hundred miles, so that I did my block at him, not only once but twenty-five times, so that he had so much fun at my expense, that the whole of Florence knew about it, because I sought sympathy from everyone with whom I was friendly. And in the end he told me that he had been joking, and because I was so happy not to travel that way, I put up with it].

Ercole’s unaccustomed levity at the expense of the hapless Trotti is a sign of his relief to be going home and to be leaving behind, albeit temporarily, the frustrating and

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79 ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, ex castris, 29 November 1478.
80 Castelnuovo is a provincial town in the Garfagnana, a region in the Apuan Alps that had been acquired for the Estensi by Niccolò III in 1430; see Chiappini, *Gli Estensi*, 113–14 and Map 2. This was the route which Eleonora had taken to Lucca in 1477 before her visit to Naples. The normal route from Florence to Ferrara would be via the valleys of the Mugello and Apuan Alps to Bologna.
81 ASMo, Cancellaria, Ambasciatori, Firenze, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Firenze, 5 December 1478. Trotti’s letter has been wrongly dated by the Archivio di Stato in Modena, which has interpreted Trotti’s “v decembre” [5 December] as “ultimo decembre” [31 December].
inconclusive military campaign and the endless round of negotiations which sought to
end the war. With his eye for human detail, the diarist, Ferrarini, described his return to
Ferrara on 10 December 1478.82 He writes that Eleonora had left Ferrara at two o’clock
in the afternoon, and travelled by boat to Torre della Fosse, and that almost the whole
population had joined her while she waited for Ercole to arrive from Bologna where he
had spent two days as the guest of Giovanni Bentivoglio. He describes the touching
scene as the duke struggled to keep his feet among the large crowd of well-wishers:

Et nanti usise di la nave lo duca, Brandelisio Trotto portò al duca lo suo figliolo et
figliola, li qual baxò lacrimando. Et usito di la sua nave, lo populo che era li li tochava le
mane baxandogelle con gran alegreza, adeo per tanto impeto de persone non poteva stare
in piedi. Alcuni etiam abrazava seglando la condicion loro et poi intrò in bucintoro dove li
era la duchessa nostra expectandollo. [Before the duke left the boat, Brandelise Trotti
brought him his son and daughter, whom he kissed, weeping. When he left his boat, the
people who were there touched his hand, kissing it with great joy, and the press of people
was so great he could not keep his feet. He also embraced several people according to
their rank and then entered the bucintoro where our duchess awaited him].

There is a general sense of relief in Ferrarini’s account of the duke’s home-coming: that
of the people of Ferrara at seeing their warrior prince return unharmed from the perils of
a distant but dangerous war, and that of Eleonora, who had not only had to bear the
burden of government in his absence, but who had been forced to endure the distress
and anxiety of knowing that Ercole’s war was being fought against members of her own
family. Although it would later emerge that Eleonora had been under considerable
pressure from her father because of the decisions that Ercole had taken in relation to the
war, there had been no hint that during his absence in Tuscany Eleonora had been

82 Ferrarini, 93. He also explains that: “la mazor parte deli soi del duca, cher era con lui, veneno prima
innanti a Ferrara e la mazor parte de dicti, che erano venuti innanti al duca per uno, erano quasi tutti
maritati, qual erano venuti per vedere le loro molgiere tanto tempo non vedute” [the greater part of the
duke’s people, who were with him, came on ahead of him and the greater part of those who came on
ahead oh by one day were almost all married and they had come to see their wives whom they hadn’t
seen for so long]; see Ferrarini, 93.
anything but loyal to her husband and conscientious in her administration of his state.

The diarist, Zambotti, was full of praise for her first regency:

Nota che quando la Excellentia del duca nostro se parti da Ferrara e andò a Fiorenza, lassò la Illustissima madona Heleonora Da Ragona in suo loco a governare e dare audientia insieme con alcuni zintilhomini e secretarii, la quale se hò portata sapientissimamente con amore e benevolentia et obedientia di tutti li subditi del Stato, fazendo tuto quello fa bixogno ad ogni sapiente Segnore [Note that, when His Excellency our duke departed from Ferrara and went to Florence, he left the Most Illustrious Lady Eleonora d’Aragona in his place to govern and to give audience, together with several gentlemen and secretaries, and she conducted herself extremely wisely with the love, goodwill and obedience of all the subjects of the state, doing everything that a wise ruler must do].

Zambotti was not alone in his praise for Eleonora. Her regency during the Pazzi War was also the inspiration for Antonio Cornazzano’s *terza rima* poem, *Del modo di regere e di regnare*, which bore this dedication:

Vostro celeste imperial costume
del regimento preso e del governo
m’à generato in cuor questo volume
[The cultivated and majestic style
of your recent rule and government
has inspired this volume.] I, vv. 28–30

On the frontispiece of the presentation copy, there is a miniature portrait of Eleonora which has been attributed to Cosmè Tura (Fig.11).
In this image, a still youthful and slender Eleonora delicately holds the staff of office, the bachetta d’oro, recalling that carried by Ercole when he was proclaimed duke of Ferrara in 1471. The staff is held equally delicately from above by a disembodied hand, symbolising divine sanction for her role as regent. Gundersheimer, in his article on the meaning of Renaissance gesture, concludes that the intention of the artist was to present a positive and benign image of Eleonora as a benevolent and pious ruler. Her posture is regal and erect, her gaze steadfastly forward, authoritative and firm. She appears as a woman who is sure of her role in life, the crown of the princess of Aragon forever replaced by a modest veil, the gold and pearl-encrusted gown by the camorra of a Ferrarese matron. In keeping with her role as Ercole’s regent, Eleonora had adopted the more restrained style of dress that he too favoured.

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86 Diario ferrarese di autori incerti, 69.
87 Gundersheimer, “Clarity and ambiguity,” 13.
88 Bryant, “Maestosa e bella,” 185–86.
Eleonora’s second regency

On 17 February 1479, after two months in Ferrara, Ercole left to resume his condotta, although this time he went only as far as Reggio, where he remained for a month, preparing a force to defend the duchess of Milan from a rebel army led by Roberto da Sanseverino and Ludovico Sforza.°9 Once again he left Eleonora as his regent, although she was only a month away from giving birth to her fifth child.°0 Of course, she was not without help, with the diarist, Caleffini, making particular reference to the ubiquitous Trotti brothers.°1

She wrote to Ercole daily, sometimes more than once a day, keeping him informed about what was happening in Ferrara, deferring to him constantly, seeking his advice on a seemingly endless number of legal disputes, and passing on to him the diplomatic notices that arrived in Ferrara.°2 Although there is no indication that Paolo Antonio’s personal correspondence with Eleonora continued, the secretary’s name does appear on the letters that Ercole had written to her almost daily, answering her queries, making

°9 Zambotti, 61. As capitano generale of the League, Ercole was bound to defend the current government of Milan against attack. Sigismondo d’Este, after a break of less than three weeks, returned to Tuscany as Ercole’s luogotenente on 1 March; see Caleffini, 305. The Diario parmense describes Ercole’s preparations for this campaign: “Hoc etiam tempore dux Hercules Extensis generalis capitaneus lige nostre, existens in region, describe fecit in terries suis et territorio Regij, et Mutine quoscumque habiles ad potentationem armorum, qui multi fuerunt, ex quibus quingintos ex melioriui illegit, ac eisdem stipendium congruum, et pro singulo eorum corazinam unam dedit restituendam, cum illa uti non foret ncessesse; mandans eosdem provisos stare, si et quotiens ab eodem requirerentur pro tuition dicti status, contra quem dubitabatur multos in fide deviare” [At this same time, Ercole d’Este, Captain General of our League, then stationed in Reggio, had lists drawn up in his own lands and in the territories of Modena and Reggio of all those fit to bear arms. These were a considerable number and from them he chose 500 of the best. He gave them appropriate pay and to each of them he issued a breast plate which was to be returned when no longer required. He ordered them to stand ready for action if and whenever he required them to protect the state: there was apprehension that many of them would not remain loyal]; see Diario parmense, 41. Translation by David Fairservice.

°0 Caleffini, 310.

°1 Caleffini, 310. The diarist’s dislike for the Trotti brothers is apparent. At least four of them had enormous influence over Ercole and Eleonora. Paolantonio, Ercole’s private secretary is described by Trotti as “più che compagno del duca,” Giacomo was always at Eleonora’s side, Galeazzo had made 2000 ducats a year doing very little, while Brandelise was Eleonora’s “magistro camerero” [chief steward].

°2 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 131, letters from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Ferrara, January–July 1479. On 22 February 1479, she informed him post haste of a letter received from Giovanni Lanfredini which contained news of the peace signed between Venice and the Turks; see ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 131, letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Ferrara, 22 February 1479.
suggestions for her to act upon, and agreeing with decisions she had made. Never slow to praise what she had done on his behalf or to express his complete faith in her judgement, he left no doubt about how much he trusted her, even chiding her for apologizing for having opened a letter intended for him:

El non bisognava che Vostra Signoria ni facesse excusatione alcuna perché la scia bene che la può aprire tute le nostre lettere e fare como li pare che ne siamo molto bem contenti anci la fa bene per dare expedicione a quello che la potesse spaciare senza nui come altre volte li havemo dicto [There was no need for Your Ladyship to make any excuse, since you know well that you can open all my letters and do as you think fit, for which I am very happy; and so you will do well to expedite those things which you could deal with without me, as I have told you on other occasions].

As well as performing her official duties, Eleonora constantly showed a loving concern for her husband’s physical well-being, enquiring after his needs, attending to the comfort of his pet ostrich, and sending him one of the creature’s eggs, only sad that he would not be able to eat it while it was still fresh on account of it being the season of Lent. Later, still mindful of the dietary restrictions of Lent, she sent to him: “uno sturioncello de li primi de questo anno quale insieme cum altre cosse de Quaresma ... aciò che col nome de Dio e per mio amore la ni goda in questo tempo” [a small sturgeon, one of the first for this year, together with other things for Lent, so that you may enjoy it in this season, in God’s name and with my love]. Her solicitude for Ercole was returned, when, on 22 March 1479, he detoured unexpectedly on his way from Reggio to Tuscany to visit her and their new baby son, whom they had named Ippolito.

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93 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, letters from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, 22 February–17 September 1479.
94 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Poggio Imperiale, 16 July 1479.
95 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 131, letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Ferrara, 27 February 1479.
96 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 131, letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Ferrara, 5 March 1479.
97 Ercole’s letters show that he then travelled via Modena to Pisa, arriving there in early April 1479.
In her letter to Ercole of 9 March 1479, Eleonora made a casual reference to the fact that Giovanni Albino, secretary to the duke of Calabria, would soon be visiting Ferrara.\(^98\) It is significant that this man, whom she described simply as “famiglio del Duca de Calabria, qual è una docta persona, e è quello che ha la cura de la sua libraria” [a member of the household of the duke of Calabria, an educated man who has charge of his library], waited until Ercole had left for Reggio before attempting to visit Eleonora. While Albino did spend a large part of his life working for Alfonso as his secretary and librarian, he is also known to have been an apologist for Ferrante’s often unpopular policies, and to have served the king as a special ambassador on several sensitive diplomatic missions.\(^99\) There is documentary evidence that this was not Albino’s first visit to Ferrara. A *salvocondotto* [safe conduct] was issued by the Florentine *Balia* (War Council) in favour of Albino and “duobus sociis seu comitibus eius” [two of his colleagues or companions] on 24 February 1478, to enable them freedom to travel freely through Florentine territory to and from Ferrara. It was to apply for the whole month of April 1478, stating specifically that (my italics): “inde descendendi et redeundi, semel et pluries, libere et secure, et fine ulla molestia vel impedimento in persona vel bonis: *non obstantibus bellis motis vel movendis*” [he may leave and return there once or on different occasions without any vexation or hindrance to himself or his possessions *even if wars are in course or imminent*].\(^100\) There is no reference to Albino’s visit to Ferrara in 1478 in any of the diaries, suggesting that it was

\(^{98}\) ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 131, letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Ferrara, 9 March 1479.

\(^{99}\) Bentley, *Politics and Culture*, 68 and 169. Volpicella describes Albino’s diplomatic career in the service of the Aragonese monarchy: “Durante gl’intrighi et le guerre che turbaron la quiete d’Italia fra il 1478 e il 1488, l’Albino volò da una città all’altra, quasi da un capo all’altro della penisola” [During the intrigues and the wars which disturbed Italy between 1478 and 1488, Albino flew from one city to another, almost from one of the peninsula’s rulers to another]. Volpicella claims that he made two visits to Ferrara, in February 1478 and in April–May 1479; see Volpicella, *Instructionum Liber*, 219.

\(^{100}\) Lettere, istruzioni, ed altre memorie de Re Aragonesi dalle quali si conferma quanto narra Giovanni Albino ne quattro libri della storia qui davanti stampati, in Raccolta di tutti i più rinomati scrittori dell’istoria generale del Regno di Napoli, vol. 5 (Naples: Giovanni Gravier, 1769), 5, hereafter referred to as Albino, *Lettere*. Translation by David Fairservice.
not common knowledge and that he may have been sent by Ferrante to try to divert Ercole from his support for Lorenzo de’ Medici.\textsuperscript{101} A decoded letter from the duke of Urbino to his ambassadors in Rome reveals that the plot to remove Lorenzo was well in hand in February 1478.\textsuperscript{102}

Caleffini refers to an incident which was an embarrassment to both Ercole and Eleonora in her role as his regent.\textsuperscript{103} On 2 June 1479, acting on Ercole’s orders, Eleonora had delivered an order of banishment to Lorenzo Neroni, the son of the Florentine exile, Dietisalvi Neroni. This was because Dietisalvi, whom Caleffini described as Ercole’s “consegliero secreto” [confidential advisor] had gone to Rome where, “tramò col papa Sisto quarto et cum lo re Ferante de Napoli, che havesseno a fare guera a fiorentini…et il fusse grande casone che la pace non se facesse” [he plotted with Pope Sixtus IV and with King Ferrante of Naples, who were making war on the Florentines…and he was the major reason that peace was not made]. The diarist explains that the Florentines had demanded that Ercole insist that Neroni return to Ferrara or face the confiscation of all his possessions.

A letter to Eleonora from Ferrante, dated 22 June 1479, is evidence that she had re-commenced her correspondence with him some time earlier.\textsuperscript{104} Ferrante’s tone was genial, thanking his daughter for her congratulations on the birth of a daughter to Queen Giovanna in April, and suggesting: “dela consolatione dicite havere presa dela figliola ne è nata, non fuimo mai in alcuno dubio che a vui è cossì caro omne nostro bono successo como ve sia lo vostro medesimo” [I was never in any doubt of the

\textsuperscript{101} Two other \textit{salvocondotti} are evidence of Albino’s free movement through Florentine territory during the war. The first of these was issued on 25 May 1479, in Ercole’s name as Captain General of the League (and counter-signed by Paolo Antonio Trotti), and applied to a return journey between the papal and royal camp and Lucca. A second document was issued by Alfonso, duke of Calabria, on 13 August 1479, giving Albino freedom to travel safely as the royal commissary with the duty of reducing troop numbers in Tuscany; see Albino, \textit{Lettere}, 5–6.

\textsuperscript{102} Simonetta, 261–84.

\textsuperscript{103} Caleffini, 307.

\textsuperscript{104} ASMo, Cancelleria estense, Estero, Carteggio di Principi e Signorie, Naples–Sicily, busta 1, letter from Ferrante I of Naples to Eleonora d’Aragona, Aversa, 22 June 1479.
pleasure you say that you took from the birth of my little daughter, since my every success is as precious to you as if it were your own]. Then referring to her own little children in Naples, he assured her: “havemo quella cura che havemo de nui proprii et cossi ne possite stare con lo animo contento como se li havessevo appresso vui [I am taking the same care of your children as I would my own and therefore you may be as happy as if you had them there with you]. Pointedly, in this letter no reference is made to Ercole or the couple’s other children in Ferrara.

When Ercole left Reggio at the end of March 1479 with numerous foot soldiers, his destination was not the Florentine camp in Tuscany, which continued under the command of Sigismondo d’Este. Instead, he turned his attention to the activities of the Milanese rebel army of Roberto da Sanseverino in the Lunigiana.\(^{105}\) Zambotti writes that Eleonora had received news on 15 April 1479 that Ercole had decided to go in search of Sanseverino’s army.\(^{106}\) In the battle which ensued, Ercole had shown great personal bravery, taking himself into the thick of the fighting, where “fu percosso in lo pecto de la coraza da uno vertone e roppela una pocho, e labarda de drio del cavalo ge fu da una spingarda alquanto brusada” [he was struck on the breast plate of his cuirass by a lance and it was pierced a little, and the armour on the right-hand side of his horse was scorched by a firearm], before winning the day. In June 1479, he returned with his army to Tuscany to confront the duke of Calabria at Poggio Imperiale. Zambotti reports that Eleonora received a letter on 23 June 1479, describing the heavy fighting in Tuscany and including an account of an attack on Ercole, from which he barely escaped with his life, by Mantuan troops, still resentful about his victory over Niccolò de Leonello.\(^{107}\)

\(^{105}\) This army was largely funded by Ferrante; see *Diario parmense*, 38.
\(^{106}\) Zambotti, 63 and n. 5; *Diario parmense*, 44–46
\(^{107}\) Zambotti, 67; Ferrarini, 106. See also n.13 in this chapter.
By August 1479, Sanseverino had reached Tortona in Lombardy, capturing Castelnuovo de Tortona, an Estense possession, which Ercole had given to Alberto d’Este to serve out the remainder of his exile.\textsuperscript{108} The \textit{Diario parmense} reports that, on 2 September 1479, Ercole, in his role as \textit{capitano generale} of the League, was summoned by the duchess of Milan to defend her state against Sanseverino’s army, leaving Sigismondo d’Este in command in the League’s forces in Tuscany. The portrait of Ercole d’Este by Dosso Dossi below, an earlier version of that in the Galleria Estense in Modena and now in a private collection in Ferrara, shows the duke in full armour of the day, one hand resting on his helmet, the other on the handle of his sword (Fig.12).

![Portrait of Ercole d’Este by Dosso Dossi](image)

\textbf{Figure 12. Dosso Dossi, Portrait of Ercole d’Este. Private collection, Ferrara (Adriano Cavicchi et al, \textit{Arte e storia a Belriguardo: la Sala delle Vigne.} Voghera: Belriguardo, 1997), 87.}

**Letters from a homesick husband**

In August 1479, Ercole’s transfer from Tuscany to Lombardy was marked by the first of a number of his autograph letters to Eleonora that afford a rare glimpse of the couple’s

\textsuperscript{108} Zambotti, 67; Caleffini, 315. Alberto wrote to Eleonora on 1 September 1479, asking her for money, “acciò non habia cagione a mangiarmi li cavalì” [so that I don’t have to eat my horses]; see ASMo, Casa e Stato, busta 130, letter from Alberto d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Pavia, 1 September 1479.
personal relationship as they entered upon their final separation of the war.\textsuperscript{109} These letters show the duke to be more concerned with the progress of the renovations to his palace than with the war. As the war in the north drifted towards its unsatisfactory conclusion and Ludovico Sforza became the nominal ruler of Milan, Ercole makes no secret of the fact that he is sick of the war and just wants to return to his life with Eleonora in Ferrara.

Ercole’s first autograph letter, written on 19 August 1479 while he was still at the Florentine camp at Poggio Imperiale, is largely taken up with the progress of major renovations to his apartments in the \textit{Palazzo del corte}.\textsuperscript{110} Concerned that the work would not be finished before he returned to Ferrara for the winter, Ercole had apparently added to the work load of her regency by making her personally responsible for the supervision of the project. This was despite the fact that she had not originally been wholly in favour of the renovations because they had required the demolition of work only recently completed.\textsuperscript{111}

The journey north was the opportunity for a brief reunion between Ercole and Eleonora. Before setting out from Tuscany, he wrote a charming and affectionate letter to his wife, suggesting that she might like to visit him as he passed through Modena on his way north:

Per non me fermare se non per una sera e andare al mio viaggio, se avite piacere de vederme como averò io de vedere vui, ve potiti atrovare lunidi a sera a Modena e li se vedremo insieme e se anchora non ve paresse de venire, fatine el nostro parere che del tutto resterò contento [if you wish to see me as indeed I wish to see you, you may find

\textsuperscript{109} ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, letters from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, 22 February–12 October 1479; ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letters from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, 19 and 26 August, 9 and 12 September, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 17 October 1479.

\textsuperscript{110} These renovations were directed by the ducal engineer, Pietro Benvenuti; see Tuohy, 72; Caleffini, 309; Zambotti, 68, n. 2.

\textsuperscript{111} The project involved the demolition of work which Ercole himself had completed just before Eleonora’s arrival in Ferrara in July 1473; see Zambotti, 68. It may be wondered if these renovations were being funded by the stipend which Ercole was receiving as \textit{Capitanio generale} of the League?
me on Monday evening in Modena and there we will see each other, and if you don’t yet see fit to come, know that I will remain happy with that.

With a certain air of diffidence he conceded that, “se anchora non ve paresse de venire, fatine el nostro parere che del tutto restarò contento” [if you don’t yet see fit to come, know that I will remain happy with that], a concession which he repeated at the end of this letter: “niente de meno se non ve pare de venire, fatti come ve pare” [nonetheless if you don’t see fit to come, do what seems right for you]. There is a distinct sense here that Ercole was uncertain about her feelings for him as he embarked upon this new stage of his condotta. Undeterred by such negative thoughts, he suggested that she arrange to bring with her the wife and son of Paolo Antonio Trotti, the wives of Messer Fiasco and Messer Antoniolo, and possibly the wives of all the courtiers who were travelling with him, as “credo che faresti piacere a l’uno o a l’altro” [I believe that you would give pleasure to all of them]. However, he urged her to keep these arrangements secret:

bisogna che la mostri de farlo senza mia saputa ma che se sia mossa avenire a Modena, intendendo che io passarò per la terra nostra e che nessuno non lo sapia che dov’io ve abia scritto e questo aciò che il comisario de Milano che ho con mi non intendesse che ve avesse facto venire a Modena, andando inprevisto come se fa [you’ll have to pretend that you are acting without my knowledge, and that you have been moved to go to Modena on learning that I will be passing through our territory, and that no one knows that I have written to tell you where, and this is so that the Milanese commissary, whom I have with me, should not know that I have had you come to Modena, since we are turning up there unexpectedly, so to speak].

Ercole’s suggestion that he and his men might be able to see their wives, from whom they had been separated for almost six months, betrays a softer and more considerate side to his nature than would normally be expected from a soldier prince. The diarists confirm that Eleonora did go to see Ercole in Modena, “con tute le donne maritade”

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112 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Poggio Imperiale, 26 August 1479.
[with all the married women], which was “per consolation de tute” [a comfort for all of them], although the part that Ercole played in the planning of the visit was never revealed.113

Ercole’s subsequent letters to Eleonora were set against the background of the evolving political situation in Milan. He wrote on 9 September 1479 that Bona of Savoy had invited Ludovico Sforza to go to the city, “essendo stata confortata la duchessa da alcuni fare così” [the duchess having been urged by several people to allow this].114

When Ercole next wrote to Eleonora on 12 September 1479, he had already reached Milan. A letter from Eleonora caused him to comment with wry humour on her suggestion that this new separation might have been easier for her to bear if they had not seen each other in Modena:

Vui dicite che non sapiti se sia stato meglio ho averme visto ho non per così pocho; io per mi so’ molto contento averve visto. Se a vui renresce, abiati paciencia che omai non pote più tornare certo che non mi abiati visto [You say that you don’t know if it was better or not to have seen me for such a short time. I, for my part, am very happy to have seen you. If you are sorry, have patience that now it’s certainly no longer possible to go back to not having seen me].115

By 16 September 1479 the political crisis in Milan had been resolved, and “el Signor Lodovico hè il principale a questo governo, le cose del Signor Roberto sono aconze per modo che spero che le cose passaràno bene [Lord Ludovico is the head of this government, the affairs of Lord Roberto (Sansverino) are fixed up, so that I hope that things are going to go well].116 The war with Naples had been discussed, and “tutti sono bene disposti ala via del Signor Re he io non li mancho de nesuna cosa perché

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113 Zambotti, 68; Caleffini, 310–11.
114 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Bassignana, 9 September 1479.
115 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Milan, 12 September 1479.
116 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Milan, 16 September 1479.
vadano a quella via” [everyone is well disposed towards the king’s point of view, and I won’t lose anything if they go that way]. Ercole himself had clearly lost any desire to continue the war, showing little concern about the terrible defeat inflicted upon the Florentine army by Eleonora’s brother at Poggio Imperiale on 9 September 1479, although his brother, Sigismondo, had barely escaped with his life.¹¹⁷ Eleonora had written to tell him that her younger brother, Cardinal Giovanni d’Aragona, had arrived in Ferrara 14 September, on his way to Hungary as Sixtus IV’s legate.¹¹⁸ Well aware of the young man’s involvement in the peace negotiations, Ercole was most solicitous about him, writing to Eleonora that, “ho tanto desiderio de fare cosa che li piacia quanto ad persona che sia al mondo” [I am very keen to do what makes him happy, as much as I would to anybody in the world].¹¹⁹

Giovanni d’Aragona remained in Ferrara for ten days at Ercole’s expense, before resuming his journey to Hungary before suddenly deciding to go to Milan, arriving there on 9 October 1479.¹²⁰ On 8 October 1479, Ercole expressed his pleasure that Eleonora’s brother would be coming to Milan, “se bene non intendo anchora la cagione” [although I don’t yet know the reason], except that “non possi fare altro che bono

¹¹⁷ Ercole is referring here to the army’s betrayal by a treacherous Florentine captain who allowed the enemy to enter the Florentine camp after sunset. The Florentines were routed, two of Ercole’s captains, his kinsmen, Galeotto della Mirandola and Nicolò da Coreggio, had been taken prisoner, while Sigismondo d’Este had barely escaped with his life; see Ferrarini, 107; Zambotti, 68–69. Zambotti writes that, in the sack which followed the rout, all Sigismondo’s belongings had been seized, together with those of his fellow captains.

¹¹⁸ Giovanni d’Aragona was named Papal Legate for Hungary by Sixtus IV on 25 January 1479 and set out from Rome on 31 August 1479. When he finally reached Buda, he was received well by Matthias Corvinus and his queen, Beatrice, who was his aunt. Although he was made Archbishop of Esztergom in Strigonia in 1479, he was unable to enjoy the benefits of the See as the previous incumbent refused to leave the post. He returned to Rome in 1480; see Volpicella, *Instructionum Liber*, 257–58.

¹¹⁹ Rubinstein explains the significant role that the young cardinal had played as a negotiator for Sixtus IV, delaying his departure for Hungary from April 1479 and remaining in Rome to conduct secret peace negotiations with the archbishop of Florence, Rinaldo Orsini, Lorenzo’s brother-in-law; see Lorenzo de’ Medici, *Lettere, IV (1479–1480)*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (Florence: Giunti–Barbèra, 1981), 82–83, hereafter referred to as Medici, *Lettere*, 4.

¹²⁰ Giovanni d’Aragona was officially in Milan to congratulate Ludovico Sforza on behalf of Sixtus and Ferrante; see Medici, *Lettere*, 4:236.
frutto” [he cannot do other than good]. Still uncertain of when he would be able to return home, he was clearly anxious to do so, leaving her with the tender injunction: “atenditi astare sana che Nostro Signore ve conserve con tutti li nui, e fati fare oracione per nui” [see that you stay well so that Our Lord may keep you with all our children, and have a prayer said for us].

When he next wrote to Eleonora on 11 October 1479, Ercole was again having problems with his injured foot, but, because he wanted to spend as much time as possible with the young cardinal, he had decided that, “se’l mio pede non guariria così presto per questo, averò pacienza che poi guariria quando so’a casa” [if my foot does not get better as quickly because of this, I will have to be patient that it will then get better when I’m at home]. He wrote that he had become very fond of the young man, “de la umanitate sua e de la sua prudencia e piacevoleza non se ne possi dire tanto” [about whose humanity, his wisdom and his agreeableness it is not possible to say too much]. However, what he wanted most was to return home, insisting that, “non altro me restarà se non solicitare la mia partita, como fo tutta via per venire a vedere e stare con vui como desidero sopra ogni cosa” [nothing remains for me to do except to press for my departure, as I do anyway in order to get to see and be with you, which I desire above everything else]. The following day he wrote to say that he had convinced her brother to return with him to Ferrara, “aciò che vui avisti questa contenteza de vederlo un’altra fiata” [so that you may have the pleasure of seeing him one more time]. He was, however, having difficulty obtaining permission for them to leave Milan, suggesting on 13 October 1479 that: “dubito che non me darià licencia la duchessa

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121 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Milan, 8 October 1479.
122 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Milan, 11 October 1479.
123 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Milan, 12 October 1479.
como ne quando io volesse perché la conosse el suo pericolo, e dame licencia tanto male volontiero che non se pote drizare la longa in bocha a dire de si’’ [I doubt that the duchess will give me permission (to leave) how and when I want it, because she knows the danger she’s in, and she gives me this permission so unwillingly that she cannot straighten out her long mouth to say yes].

As the time for their departure approached and although he had already given her the planned itinerary for their return journey to Ferrara, Ercole’s mood appeared to change and he made the rather odd suggestion that, “io dubito asai de non trovare alozamento per me a Ferrara e quando così fosse seria meglio che io restasse a Modena fino che el cardenale fosse partito” [I doubt very much that I’ll find accommodation in Ferrara and, if that were the case, it would be better for me to remain in Modena until the cardinal has left]. While it was true that his new apartments were still not finished and that appropriate accommodation would be needed for Eleonora’s brother and his party, Ercole was expressing a hesitation which was at odds with his earlier protestations of impatience to return to Ferrara. He closed the letter in the same vein: “avisatime se ve pare che abia arestare più in uno loco che in un’altro, aciò non recevesse questa incomodate de non trovare alozamento opure se ve pare che io venga” [let me know if you think that I must stay longer in one place or another, so that I don’t have to accept this inconvenience of not finding accommodation, or rather if you think that I should come].

What Ercole wrote to Eleonora on 15 October 1479 confirmed that there had indeed been some misunderstanding between them. He referred to a recent letter from

124 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Milan, 13 October 1479.
125 ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Milan, 15 October 1479. In a letter to Eleonora, signed by Paolo Antonio Trotti and dated 14 October 1479, Ercole writes: “Lo Illustrissimo Marchese de Mantua ne ha mandato el salvoconducto che gli havemo demandato, et cum molte bene parole si è deluso cum nui che gli habiamo facto tal
he, which he had not considered warranted a reply, since, “non contenendo altro che solicitarme al tornata a casa he dirme che non ve avisando de la mia venuta forsi che io credesse che vui non aviti piacere de vederme como io non ho de vedere vui” [not having anything in it but urging me to return home and telling me that, by not advising you of my arrival, perhaps I believed that you don’t want to see me as much as I want to see you]. He continued, “non bisogna dire nè fare altra scusa perché mo averiti visto che averiti male onpionale perché ve ho scritto ogni cosa e se non lo scrivevo era perché non ne sapevo niente anci fino mo” [there’s no need to say or make any other excuse, since you will now have seen that you had the wrong idea, because I’ve written to tell you everything and, if I didn’t write to you, it was because I knew nothing about it until now]. He revealed that he was having “tanta fatica che non poteristi credere” [such trouble that you couldn’t believe] trying to arrange their departure. Although they were supposed to leave that day, “el bucintoro non era in ordine, e sarà fatica che sia in ordine domatina perché lo ha bisognato calafatore e dare la pece che non teneva acqua per niente” [the bucintoro was not ready, and it would be difficult to have it ready for tomorrow morning because it has needs calking and coating with pitch because it had no chance of keeping the water out]. However, there was no doubt about how much he longed to see her, insisting that, “più longo me pare adesso quisti sette dì per el desiderio che ho de vederve che non ho facto quasi tutto el resto del tempo che non ve ho visto” [because of the desire I have to see you, these seven days (of the journey) seem to me to be so much longer now than almost all the other time when I did not see you].

dimanda, mostrandoni che per le sue terre possiamo passare, stare e comandare come nele nostre proprie, pregandoni che mai più non gli vogliamo dimandare salvoconducto” [The Most Illustrious Marchese of Mantua has sent the safe conduct which we have requested from him, and with many fine words he says that he is disappointed with us for having made this request, pointing out that we can pass through his territories, remain and issue orders as if in our own, begging that we must never again request safe conduct from him]; see ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Pavia, 14 October 1479.
Although Ercole had predicted that the journey would take a week, when he wrote to Eleonora again on 17 October 1479, they were making record time: \(^{126}\)

per questa la intenderà como per el desiderio che avemo de vederve tanto più presto, avemo facto le zornate da cavalaroper modo che piacendo a dio seremo domane che sarà lunedì a cena a Revere he martedì a cena cum la Signoria Vostra a Ferrara [with this letter you will learn that, because of our desire to see you all the sooner, we have made up days with teams of horses, so that, God willing, tomorrow, which will be Monday, we will be dining at Revere, and on Tuesday we will be dining with Your Ladyship in Ferrara]. \(^{127}\)

Caleffini reports that Ercole arrived in Ferrara, as he had suggested in his letter, on Tuesday 19 October 1479, “cum grande amore del populo ferrarexe et faluò et suoni de campane et schiopeti” [to a great show of affection by the people of Ferrara and bonfires and the ringing of bells and gunfire]. \(^{128}\) Eleonora had gone out to meet the two *bucintori* and five other large boats, which the duchess of Milan had lent to convey the party to Ferrara. Despite Ercole’s concerns, the whole party was accommodated by Eleonora in the *Castello vecchio*. \(^{129}\)

**Estense involvement in the peace process**

By November 1479 it was clear that the war was going very badly for Florence, with enemy troops occupying several towns in the south and the military assistance promised by Milan and Venice increasingly in doubt. \(^{130}\) Cracks had also been appearing in the solidarity of the League’s support for Lorenzo and his state, especially in Milan.

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\(^{126}\) ASMo, Casa e Stato, Carteggio dei principi, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Casale Maggiore, 17 October 1479.

\(^{127}\) Revere is a small town on the right bank of the Po between Mantova and Ferrara. Tuohy writes that boats were sometimes drawn by horses in the narrower stretches of the Po. He gives the example from 1485 of a carter and six companions being paid for towing the large *bucintoro* from Ferrara to Stellata when Ercole wanted to go to Venice; see Tuohy, 155.

\(^{128}\) Caleffini, 316.

\(^{129}\) Zambotti, 69.

\(^{130}\) Milan’s failure to produce the support expected by Florence was largely due to the political instability which had prevailed in the duchy since the assassination of Galeazzo Sforza in December 1476. While Venice still claimed to be occupied with the Turkish crisis, as early as 22 February 1479 Eleonora had written to Ercole of a peace agreement between Venice and the Turks; see ASMo, Casa e Stato,
On 11 August 1479 the duke of Calabria had sent a short dictated letter to Eleonora from his camp near San Gimignano, textual references within it revealing that it was not the first he had sent her, that he was receiving regular news about (or from) her, and that he had managed to keep the correspondence secret by not using his own messengers. In another letter to Eleonora, dated 29 September 1479, Alfonso referred to the visit of an emissary from Ferrara to his camp in Tuscany:

Lo vostro inbasciatore è stato e sta qua con mico e ho deliberato tenerlo finché vengano quisti inbasciatori e dopo ve lo manderò bene informato de tucto e non lo farò andare in Napole. Le recommandazione che scrivite faczo ala Maestà del Signor Re le farò volentieri [Your ambassador has been and remains here with me and I have decided to keep him here until these other ambassadors come, and afterwards I will send him to you well informed about everything, and I won’t have him go to Naples. I will happily pass on to His Majesty the King the recommendations of which you have written].

Alfonso’s letter provides irrefutable evidence that, by the end of September 1479, Eleonora was already involving herself in the peace process and that she was using her close relationship to the enemy commander to communicate her own “recommandacione” for the end of hostilities, in the expectation that he would pass them on to their father. However, as Alfonso’s letter was addressed only to Eleonora, it cannot be known if the duchess was acting alone or as Ercole’s regent. The ambassador to whom Alfonso referred in this letter was Stefano della Montanara, whose mission to the enemy camp is documented by his own letter to Eleonora, although it is largely taken up with Stefano’s descriptions of the terror he had experienced at finding himself

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Carteggio dei principi, busta 131, letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Ferrara, 22 February 1479.
131 ASMo, Estero, Principi e Signorie, Naples–Sicily, busta 2, letter from Alfonso, duke of Calabria, to Eleonora d’Aragona, from the papal and royal camp, San Gimignano, 11 August 1479.
132 ASMo, Estero, Principi e Signorie, Naples–Sicily, busta 2, autograph letter from Alfonso, duke of Calabria, to Eleonora d’Aragona, from the papal and royal camp at Colle Val d’Elsa, 29 September 1479.
caught up in the crossfire of an armed skirmish. He was, however, able to report one vital piece of intelligence to the duchess:

Questo die de sera ei venuto uno cancelliero del Signore Ludovico Sforza qui in campo et ha visitato la Excellentia de questo dignissimo duca. Et cum Soa Excellentia èi stato assai, non ho potuto intendere altramente quello che’l vada facendo, se non che lui ha significato al prelibato graciosissimo duca che li Imbasciatori de Milano sono stati a Firenze, et che domane debbano venire qui in campo. Et anche ho inteso che’l vada per pigliare la recognitone del ducato de bari in nome del dicto Signore Ludovico [This evening a chancellor from Lord Ludovico Sforza came here to the camp and visited His Excellency this most worthy duke. He was with His Excellency for a long time, (although) I have not been able to find out what else he’s up to, except that he indicated to the excellent, most gracious duke that the Milanese ambassadors have been to Florence, and that tomorrow they should come here to the camp. I also heard that he is going to seek recognition of the duchy of Bari in the name of Lord Ludovico].

Lorenzo de’ Medici had written to his ambassador in Milan, Girolamo Morelli, on 25 September 1479 about the expected arrival of these Milanese ambassadors, Pietro da Gallarate and Giovanni Angelo Talenti.134

On 17 November 1479, Diomede Carafa wrote to Eleonora what appears to be his first letter in many months, possibly a sign that Ferrante’s own attitude towards the war was changing. Carafa’s love and respect for her had obviously not lessened during the war, but he expressed his deep regret that they had been unable to communicate with each other for so long:

Ben deverà pare-reo alla Signoria Vostra cosa nova le mey littere, et sape Idio con che affanno l’aio comportato non posserve scrivere, nè dalla Signoria Vostra avere lettera; et

133 ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1, letter from Stefano della Montanara to Eleonora d’Aragona, from the papal and royal camp at Colle Val d’Elsa, 29 September 1479. While Guerra suggests that this letter was directed to Ercole, it is clearly addressed “Illustrissima Madama Mia” [My Most Illustrious Madama]; see Guerra, Soggetti, 289, n. 125.
135 ASMo, Estero, Principi e Signorie, Naples–Sicily, busta 4, autograph letter from Diomede Carafa to Eleonora d’Aragona, Naples, 17 November [1479]. Paolo Antonio Trotti refers to a letter from Carafa which had arrived at the Florentine camp in October 1478; see ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, autograph letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Poggio Imperiale, 2 October 1478 (2).
tucto aio facto per la meglyor parte. Spero <che> li tenpe motarano che porrò fare como la volontà mia requede [My letters must appear to Your Ladyship like a novelty, and God knows how difficult it has been for me not to be able to write to you, nor to have letters from Your Ladyship. And I did it all for the best. I hope that times will change so that I will be able to do what I want].

The letter accompanied gifts for her children, of whom Isabella was clearly his favourite, referring to her as, “la mia Illustissima figlyana, la quale m’è referito non me ave desmenticato” [my Most Illustrious god-daughter, who I am told has not forgotten me]. Then it was time for news about her two little children in Naples, whom he described as “como ad due perne” [just like two pearls]. He wrote most fondly of Beatrice:

ey cosa <che> mai non crederissivo se non lo vidite, quanta modestia et descrecione ey in essa, et ve dico ey lo mio spasso che a pena me sente che me vene ad trovare et me ciama, ‘lo Signor comte mio bello.’ Se io l’amo la Signoria Vostra lo pò penzare [she is such as you could never believe unless you saw her, such modesty and wisdom is in her, and I tell you, she is my delight, scarcely does she hear me coming to visit that she calls to me, “My lovely Lord Count.” Your Ladyship can imagine whether I love her or not].

Of Ferrante’s queen, Giovanna, he wrote, “la Signora Regina sta bene et più presto smagrata che ingrasata, et la infante certo ey una bella criatura” [My Lady the Queen has lost weight rather than gained it, and the infanta is a lovely creature]. He urged Eleonora to contact her young step-mother, as “ve ama assai…scrivetele quando potite” [she loves you very much…write to her when you can]. It is very noticeable that Carafa said not one word about her father in this letter, suggesting that he was writing on his own initiative. His affection for Eleonora was such that he could not wait for peace to return to contact her and assure her that all was well with all her loved ones in Naples. It can only be imagined how much comfort Eleonora took from her old friend’s letter as she waited for peace to return.
Brandelise Trotti’s instructions

As efforts to seek a peaceful solution to the war gained in momentum during the autumn of 1479, it became increasingly obvious to the members of the League that a major stumbling block was the personal antipathy of the pope and Ferrante towards Lorenzo de’ Medici. It has long been accepted that it was Lorenzo’s perception of his personal responsibility for the war which inspired his peace mission to Naples in December 1479, and that it was that action which signalled the beginning of genuine peace negotiations. However, documents in the Archivio di Stato in Modena reveal that, some weeks before Lorenzo made his decision to go to Naples, Ercole had sent his wife’s chamberlain, Brandelise Trotti, to the duke of Calabria in Tuscany, to ask him to make representations to Ferrante that he should reconcile with Lorenzo. Eleonora had used the same occasion to ask her brother to intercede with their father on her behalf that he might find a means by which Ercole could abandon his condotta with the League with honour. Trotti’s successful canvassing of these two issues with the duke of Calabria may be seen as paving the way for Lorenzo’s personal visit to Naples in 1479 and for the peace negotiations which brought an end to the Pazzi War in March 1480.

A draft copy of Ercole’s instructions to Brandelise Trotti, dated 14 November 1479, is conserved in the Archivio di Stato in Modena. Their main focus is the need

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136 The Florentine Dieci di Balia wrote to their ambassador in Venice, Luigi Guicciardini, on 6 December 1479: “et la cagione di questa sua deliberazione disse essere perché intendendolo il Papa et la Maestà del Re gravarsi molto di lui et iactare la cagione tucta della guerra et di queste turbationsi di Italia in sé, li era paruto pigliare questa via, la quale li pareva dovere fare uno de’ due effecti, o aiutare la pace, della quale la città nostra et tucta Italia ha grandissimo bisogno, o veramente potere chiarare se questa cagione o veramente altra cagione è quella che fa questa guerra et perturbatione” [and he said that the reason for his decision was because, hearing that the Pope and His Majesty the King were seriously encumbered by him and that they had hurled the whole cause of the war and these disturbances at him, it had seemed to him that this action would achieve one of two outcomes, either to help bring the peace, of which our city and all Italy is in such great need, or indeed to be able to clarify if this or another cause is in truth what is driving this war and disturbance]; see Medici, Lettere, 4:251.

137 ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1, Instructions to Brandelise Trotti from the Most Illustrious duke of Ferrara to the Most Illustrious duke of Calabria, 14 November 1479, hereafter referred to as Ercole d’Este, Instructions.
for Ferrante to reconcile with Lorenzo de’ Medici and Florence, or risk the formation of a new and potentially dangerous alliance between Florence and Venice. Brandelise Trotti was first to remind Alfonso of the visit of Stefano della Montanara in September, the purpose of which had been to ask Alfonso to beg his father, “che la fusse contenta de abbracciare Signori fiorentini et il Magnifico Lorenzo per soi amici” [to agree to embrace the Florentines and the Magnificent Lorenzo as his friends], and to convince the king that by such means he would be able, “guidare et governare le cose de Italia a suo modo come siamo certi che meritamente la habii sempre desiderato” [to guide and govern the affairs of Italy in his own way, as we are certain he has deservedly always wished].

Alfonso had replied to Montanara that, as Sixtus IV was totally opposed to the idea, it would be impossible to achieve and Montanara had returned to Ferrara. Brandelise Trotti was now to inform Alfonso that Florence, although desperate for some agreement between herself, the pope and Ferrante, was on the point of “se strengersi cum Venetiani” [joining with the Venetians], and that the Florentine ambassador, Aloysius Guicciardini, had been sent to Ferrara to seek the opinion of Ercole, “como al suo colligato et capitanio” [as an ally and military leader of the League]. The envoy was to emphasise that such an alliance would be a disaster for the whole of Italy, since, “essendo uniti venetiani et fiorentini insieme, poco temerano tuto il resto de Italia, come è accaduto dele altre volte che sono stati in simile unione” [if the Venetians and the Florentines are united, they will little fear the whole of the rest of Italy, as has happened on other occasions when they were united in a similar union].

To support that argument, Brandelise Trotti was to invoke the name of Ferrante’s old friend and ally, Francesco Sforza:

parendoni che Sua Maestà habia poca consideratione ale opere del Illustriissimo Signor

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138 Ercole d’Este, Instructions, 1.
139 Ercole d’Este, Instructions, 2.
Duca Francesco il quale mai non operò tanto altro in questa Italia che a tenere largi et separati fiorentini da venetiani, parendoli che’l potesse fare ciò che’l volesse fare quando dicte potentie stesseno disunite [it being apparent that His Majesty has little consideration for the efforts of the Most Illustrious Duke Francesco (Sforza), who never did anything else in this Italy of ours except keep apart and separate Florentines from Venetians, believing that he could do what he wanted to do when those powers remained disunited].

Trotti was then to inform Alfonso that Ercole had been able to persuade the Florentine envoy “atenire la briglia in mano et astare suxo le pratichè senza venire cussì appresso a conclusione alcuna” [to hold the reins and to remain in the negotiations without presently coming to any conclusion], reminding him (Guicciardini) that Ferrante was still in discussion with the Milanese ambassadors and that as yet no one knew what his final decision would be. Then with regard to Ferrante’s alliance with Sixtus, Brandelise was to suggest that, “non se persuaderemo mai che Sua Maestà sia sì cechata in questa cosa che la non deba condescendere a quello che non poteria essere più al suo proposito” [we will never be persuaded that His Majesty is so blind in this matter that he should not agree to that which could not be more in his interests], and reminding him of the transitory nature of the pontiff’s power: “nè deve havere Sua Maestà tanto respecto al papa che è mortale et vechio et che non ha alassare drieto a lui heredi in quella sedia” [nor should His Majesty have so much respect for the Pope who is mortal and old and who does not have heirs to leave behind him on that throne].

Alfonso was to be urged to pass these things on to Ferrante and to convince him to take them into account:

perché la non fece mai opera ní farà che possi essere più vale al stato suo et de tutto il resto de Italia de questo perché nui se persuademo che cum la Maestà del Signor Re suo padre la possa fare et concludere ciò che la vole et specialmente in queste cose che non

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poteriano essere più al proposito de Sua Maestà” [because he neither does now nor will do
in the future anything which may be more beneficial to his state and to all the rest of Italy
than this, because we are convinced that with His Majesty the King, his father, he can do
and conclude whatever he wants and especially in these things which cannot be more
relevant to His Majesty].

Although the final section of Trotti’s instructions is difficult to read because of
the many corrections, it is still possible to detect Ercole’s anger about the damage
inflicted upon the states of Italy by Ferrante’s vendetta against Lorenzo. The envoy was
therefore to suggest to the king that, “la se debbe anche ricordare che l’è da preponere le
cose grande et de importancia apertinente ali stati a qualche iniuria che pretendesse Sua
Maestà havere ricevuta” [he should also remember that the big things which are
important to the states are to be put before some injury His Majesty has claimed to have
received].

Both the draft and final versions of Eleonora’s instructions to Brandelise Trotti for
his mission to her brother, dated respectively 16 and 17 November 1479, are conserved
in the Modena Archive. It is instantly obvious that Eleonora was using this mission to
her brother for a completely different purpose to Ercole, and that its aim was to attempt
to justify the position that her husband had adopted and maintained throughout the war.
The person to whom Eleonora was giving this task had been described by Caleffini in
1475 as “de grandissima auctoritade cum sua excellentia” [having the greatest influence
with Her Excellency], implying that she trusted him and his capabilities completely.

Trotti was to remind Alfonso of his first attempts to draw Ercole away from his

142 Ercole d’Este, Instructions, 2–3.
143 Ercole d’Este, Instructions, 3.
144 ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1,
Instructions to Brandelise Trotti from Eleonora, duchess of Ferrara, Ferrara, 16 (draft) and 17 November
1479, hereafter referred to as Eleonora d’Aragona, Instructions.
145 Caleffini, 107.
alliance with the League. It becomes clear that Giovanni Albino had been sent to Ferrara more than once that year:

per farci intendere quanto despiacere pigliava la Maestà del Signor Re nostro padre et anche Sua Signoria per essere il prefato nostro consorte al soldo de questa liga et specialmente de li Illustriissimi Signori de Milan et de Fiorentini et per essere in campo contra de Sua Signoria, facendone fare instantia che volessimo operare per quelli migliori mezi che ni paresse de retrarlo da tale impresa cum offerireni certi partiti che fariano la Santità del Nostro Signore et la Maestà del Signor Re al prefato nostro consorte” [to inform us of the great displeasure of our father, His Majesty the king, and also of His Lordship (the duke of Calabria), that our husband is in the pay of this League and especially of the lords of Milan and of Florence, and that he is encamped against His Lordship (the duke of Calabria). He petitioned us to work by the best means we could find to divert him from that undertaking, with offers of certain terms which His Holiness the Pope and His Majesty the king would make to our husband, as His Most Illustrious Lordship should remember].

While Eleonora had apparently taken Ferrante’s complaints on board, and possibly agreed with them, she had refused to act upon them, putting her duty to Ercole as a loyal and loving wife ahead of her feelings for her father. Her stated reason was that she had been concerned about Ercole’s personal safety, as he was “in campo in le terre de altri et dove non si haveria potuto tractare simile cose senza grande pericolo dela persona sua” [encamped in foreign territory, where such things could not have been discussed without great personal danger]. She had therefore told Albino that, “il non ni pareva che ’l fusse il tempo di tentare tale cosa ma expectare qualche megliore opportunità” [we did not think it was the time to attempt such a thing, but to wait for some better opportunity]. This is a revealing statement as it implies that Eleonora’s mind had not been totally closed to the possibility that Ercole might abandon his condotta with the

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146 Eleonora d’Aragona, Instructions, 1.
League, and that she had been extremely successful at hiding her real feelings, performing her role as regent in Ferrara and avoiding any suggestion of disloyalty either to Ercole or his allies. Brandelise was also to remind Alfonso that she had asked Albino and her own envoy, Stefano della Montanara, to petition her brother to convey her recommendations to their father, “perché Sua Signoria operaria che la Maestà del Signor Re et il papa gli fariano deli partiti digni et honorevoli quando il potessimo condure ale voglie sue facendolo despicare da questa brigata” [since His Lordship would see to it that His Majesty the king and the Pope would make him worthy and honourable terms if we could bring him around to their way of thinking, by detaching him from this alliance]. She was making this personal plea to her brother and her father now that Ercole was safely back in Ferrara, “desiderando nui sopra tute le cose de questo mondo de vedere Quella in amore et gratia dela prefata Maiestà et del prefato Signor duca nostro fratello” [since we wish above all the things in this world to see him received with love and favour by his Majesty and the Most Illustrious Duke our brother]. Referring to the visit of another of Alfonso’s agents, one Carlo Stendardo, Brandelise was to object to the approach that this man had taken in suggesting that Ercole should indicate his own terms for abandoning the condotta, since:

quallo man ni pare il modo per il quale possiamo intrare su questa prattica col nostro prefato consorte, havendolo già motegiato che ci bastarìa l’animo deli farli proponere deli partiti honorevoli quando il volesse venire ala devotione del Signor Re nostro padre et che fariamo al proposito suo molto più de quello che’il tene al presente et che se gli poteria pigliare tal mezzo che seria cum salvatione del honore suo [we do not think that this is the way or the manner by which we might engage in this discussion with our husband. We have already quipped that all it would take is determination to propose honourable terms to him if he wanted to come over to the side of the Lord King our father, and they would meet his needs much better than the terms he is under at present and that if he could take such terms they would be the salvation of his honour].

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148 Eleonora d’Aragona, Instructions, 2.
Trotti was to remind Alfonso that Ercole’s contract with Milan and Florence was for another two years and of the possibility that, “rimanendo questa Liga ferma, come facilmente la poteria remanere, per non volere il statuto de Milano forsi abandonare fiorentini et Lorenzo, non volendo il papa et il Re abbracierli” [this League will remain strong, as it easily could, because the state of Milan will perhaps not want to abandon the Florentines and Lorenzo, if the pope and the king are not willing to embrace them].

Alfonso therefore had to think of some good way by which she might “honestamente potessimo condure epso nostro consorte de lassar e questoro che a nui pare difficile et et quodammodo impossibile a trovarlo non volendo manchare dela fede sua come il non faria mai” [honestly direct our husband to abandon them. To find such a way seems difficult to us and in some ways impossible, since he does not want to break his word, and he never would]. Trotti was therefore to suggest that “le cose che vano intorno che questa Liga non staria ferma et che le cose de queste potentie colligate pigliariano altra forma come speremo et ne pare havere per certo che farano” [the things that concern this League will not remain constant and the affairs of these allied states will take another form, as we hope will happen, and it appears to be certain they will].

As confirmation of this, he was to inform Alfonso of the presence in Ferrara of the Venetian ambassador, Zacharia Barbaro, who:

fa grande instantia cum epso nostro consorte che Sua Signoria voglia essere cum loro et cum fiorentini quando se restringessino et colligassono insieme, offerendoli partiti assai digni et honorevoli, il quale ambassatore per epso nostro consorte se tene su le generale senza altra conclusione” [is being very insistent with our husband that His Lordship should be with them and the Florentines if they were to stick together and form an

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149 Barbaro had arrived in Ferrara on 1 November 1479. While Sigismondo and Rinaldo d’Este had gone only a short distance from the city to meet him, they “lo accompagnò cum trombe et pifare insino in casa del vescovo de Ferrara, ad alozare a spese del duca” [accompanied him with trumpets and pipes as far as the house of the bishop of Ferrara, where he was lodged at the duke’s expense], remaining until 22 November; see Caleffini, 317. Zambotti also reported that Barbaro had expressed “la benivolentia grande, la quale ha porta’ e porta a la sua ducale signoria, intendoendo che epsa hé bon figlio de San Marcho” [the great goodwill which (Venice) bore and bears towards His Lordship the duke, meaning that he is a good son of San Marco]; see Zambotti, 70.
alliance, that ambassador offering very worthy and honourable terms to our husband if he sticks to the general idea without any other conclusion].

Brandelise was therefore to urge Alfonso to act so that Ercole was offered some alternative to his condotta with the League:

Et però è necessario che tu strengi per parte nostra epso Duca nostro fratello a metterni ale mane tali partiti per mezo de qualche suo, che non si lassi andare epso nostro consorte ad altra via che ala sua, et che’l non sia constrecto a pigliare questo o altro partito per non gli essere facta proposta alcuna per parte dela Maestà del Signor Re ala quale meritamente il se gli potesse attachare come non si fece essere per Sua Maestà quando si fece quest’altra sua conducta; che seria un errore da canto suo pegiore del primo” [And therefore it is necessary that you press our brother the Duke on our behalf to put such terms in our hands by means of some trusted representative of his, so that our husband is not allowed to take any other path but his, and so that he is not forced to take this or another contract simply because no other proposal has been made to him on behalf of His Majesty the king, to whom he could worthily attach himself just as easily as he signed up against His Majesty when he took on this other condotta. That would be an error on his part worse than the first].

Brandelise was return immediately to Ferrara, with or without a reply from Alfonso, “perché, oltra che questa cosa recheda celerità, tu sciai essere il bisogno che havemo ogni hora di te per le facende nostre” [because, apart from the fact that this is urgent, you know how much we need you every hour for our affairs].

While there is no documentary evidence in the Modena Archive of any response to Brandelise Trotti’s mission, Ercole wrote to his ambassador in Florence, Antonio da Montecatini, on 18 November 1479, asking him to inquire if Florence would be willing to send an ambassador to Naples to take advantage of Ferrante’s expressed interest in some level of negotiation. Two days later, Filippo Strozzi had left for Naples, instructed by Lorenzo to tell Ferrante “che totalmente gli si rimeteva nelle bracia” [that

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he was putting himself completely in his hands]. The Milanese ambassadors, Pietro da Gallarate and Giovanni Angelo Talenti, wrote that they had found Ferrante “molto meno intransigente nel richiedere l’espulsione di Lorenzo da Firenze di quanto non lo fossero il Papa e Girolamo Riario e lo stesso ambasciatore aragonese a Roma, Anello Arcamone” [much less intransigent in his demand that Lorenzo be expelled from Florence than were the Pope and Girolamo Riario and that very Aragonese ambassador in Rome, Aniello Arcamone]. The proposals which Ferrante presented to the Milanese representatives in Naples on 3 November 1479 made no reference to the need for Lorenzo’s expulsion from Florence, and, in a letter to Arcamone dated 9 November 1479, the duke of Calabria accepted his father’s concession, “benché la expulsione de Lorenzo forse fossi stata più onorevole” [although the expulsion of Lorenzo would perhaps have been more honourable]. Ferrante’s views were not shared by Sixtus IV who maintained his stance that Lorenzo should be ousted from power in Florence.

Ercole’s own path in the peace process took an unusual turn when, on 1 December 1479, he dispatched Niccolò Sadoletto on a complex mission that would involve visits to Lorenzo de’ Medici in Florence and the duke of Calabria in Tuscany, before seeking a meeting with Ferrante in Naples. Sadoletto’s mission to Naples was in effect the first step in the resumption of diplomatic relations between Ferrara and Naples, although they were still officially at war. The most striking thing about Sadoletto’s entire mission was Ercole’s repeated insistence that it remain secret. This had meant that this

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153 Strozzi had developed excellent personal and business relations with Ferrante during the many years which he, his father and his brothers had spent in Naples both as Medicean exiles and as private citizens; see Medici, Lettere, 4:249.
154 When they had visited the dukes of Calabria and Urbino they had been informed that both the Pope and Ferrante were ready to make peace, “pur che Lorenzo sii mandato fora de Firenzo, et non aliter” [provided that Lorenzo is sent way from Florence, and not otherwise]; see Medici, Lettere, 4:395.
155 The original documents being unavailable in the Archivio di Stato in Modena at the time of writing, I have used Luciano Chiappini’s transcriptions; see Chiappini, “La politica di Lorenzo de’ Medici nel 1479,” 144–47.
156 His predecessor, Mengo dalle Armi, had died in Ferrara in October 1477. Sadoletto’s term in Naples was to continue until 1482; see Caleffini, 257.
most delicate assignment had been committed to a man who was both unknown in
diplomatic circles and totally inexperienced in the art of negotiation. When Sadoleto
arrived in Naples, it would soon become clear that the task he had been assigned by
Ercole was far beyond his capabilities, and that he had been chosen simply because he
was totally unknown. Ercole, who was most anxious not to be seen to be breaking his
oath of commitment to the members of the League, in particular Venice, by taking part
in the peace process, would therefore be able maintain his own anonymity. He
explained the reasons for his secrecy in his instructions to Sadoleto:

Il non ni pareva conveniente de mandare al presente pubblicamente nostro Ambassatore
per non discoprire questa cosa a venetiani aci che non havessino cagione de turbarla con
fiorentini perché mandare del nostro Ambassatore ne faria aperta dimostratione ma che
per satisfactione de suo Signore et pre dimostratone del nostro bone animo verso la
Santità de nostro Signor et Sua Maestà mandaressimo per adesso un nostro incognito
secretemente il quale havesse prima ad intendere come se adrizzasseno le cose nostre et
anche del resto deli colligate de questa nostra presente liga” [It did not seem opportune at
the moment to send our ambassador publicly, in order not to disclose this matter to the
Venetians and so that they would not have cause to be upset with the Florentines, since
sending our ambassador would be an open show of affection, but for the satisfaction of
His Lordship (Alfonso) and to demonstrate our goodwill towards His Holiness and His
Majesty, for now we should secretly send our unknown man, who should first hear how
our matters and also those of the members of this present League are being directed].

On 5 December 1479, Lorenzo had announced, to an “assai buono numero di
cittadini” [to a very sizeable number of citizens], his decision to go to Naples himself.

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157 This would suggest that he was very young and at the very beginning of his diplomatic career, a
supposition that is supported by diary references. He was the Ferrarese ambassador to Venice in 1482
and to Hungary in 1484; see Caleffini, 363 and 617, while the anonymous diarist refers to his returning
to Ferrara in November 1496 from France, where he had been Ferrarese ambassador to Louis XII; see
Diario ferrarese, 191. Moores writes that Sadoleto remained in Naples until June 1482 (when he left
there presumably to take up the position in Venice), and includes a letter from Diomede Carafa to
Eleonora, provisionally dated 20 June 1481, in which “Messer Nicolò vostro ambassatore” is described
in glowing terms; see Moores, “Diomede Carafa,” 177–78, 442–43. For the letter, see ASMo, Estero,
Carpeggio del Principi et Signorie, Naples-Sicily, busta 4, autograph letter from Diomede Carafa to
Eleonora d’Aragona, Naples, 20 June [1481?].

158 Chiappini, “La politica di Lorenzo de’ Medici nel 1479,” 145–47; ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero,
Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1, Instructions from Ercole d’Este to Niccolò
Sadoleto, Ferrara, 1 December 1479.
Although some surprise was expressed at this decision, in a letter dated 7 December 1479 from the Milanese ambassadors in Naples, it was revealed that on 2 December 1479 a special envoy, Francesco Gaddi, had been sent by the Florentine Dieci di Balia to the duke of Calabria to discuss truce violations, and that he had requested a private meeting with the duke, during which:

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\text{in effecti gli disse per parte del Magnifico Lorenzo come Sua Magnificentia havea deliberato de venir liberamente da la Maestà del Signore Re, e ch’el volesse dar ordene che si trovasseno qualche galee verso Pisa per potere esquire questo” [he told him, in effect, on behalf of the Magnificent Lorenzo how His Magnificence had decided to go of his own free will to see His Majesty the King, and that he wanted to arrange for galleys to be sent to Pisa so that this could be put into effect].}^{159}
\]

How much this was due to Ercole’s assurances that he would be honourably received in Naples by Ferrante cannot be known, but suffice to say that, when Lorenzo boarded one of three galleys sent by Ferrante to convey him to Naples, sometime between 16 and 18 December 1479, a potent symbol of the king’s goodwill was the presence on board of Giovanni Tommaso Carafa, Diomede Carafa’s eldest son.\(^{160}\) This goodwill continued throughout Lorenzo’s time in Naples, despite his own somewhat melodramatic suggestion to the Florentine Signoria on 7 December 1479 that he was putting himself “in qualche pericolo” [in some danger] by going to Naples.\(^{161}\)

Although Niccolò Sadoleto attempted to represent Ercole’s interests at the peace negotiations in Naples, the letters that he sent to the duke in Ferrara suggest that he was spectacularly unsuccessful in this task, being forced to admit that he was unable to discover much about what had been decided on a daily basis because he was excluded

\(^{159}\) Medici, Lettere, 4:249–50.
\(^{160}\) For the period of the negotiations Lorenzo was accommodated by Eleonora’s old friend, Messer Pascale Garlon, as his own properties in Naples had been confiscated by Ferrante prior to the outbreak of war; see Notar Giacomo, 145.
\(^{161}\) Medici, Lettere, 4:266.
from all significant discussions.\textsuperscript{162} When the League documents were published on 25 March 1479, the signatories were the Pope, the king of Naples, the dukes of Milan, Florence, and Siena, with places to be reserved for Venice and Ferrara.\textsuperscript{163} The omission of Ferrara as a signatory of the new League appears to have been an attempt by Ferrante to appease Sixtus IV. Ercole’s ambition to become \textit{capitano generale} of the new League also came to nothing, although Lorenzo had declared that “era obligatissimo al Signore duca de Ferrara” [he was most obligated to the duke of Ferrara]. It was clear that Ferrante intended to give “più reputazione et honore che si puote” [the most possible respect and honour] to the dukes of Calabria and Urbino, who would share between them the roles of \textit{luogotenente} and \textit{capitano generale} of the new League.

Through an analysis of documents conserved in the \textit{Archivio di Stato} in Modena, it has been demonstrated that by both Ercole d’Este and Eleonora d’Aragona played significant roles in both the prosecution and the resolution of the Pazzi War. Despite Eleonora’s anomalous position in Ferrara after Ercole chose to take the opposing side to her father in the war and to accept the position of \textit{capitano generale} of the allied army, it has been shown that she maintained her loyalty to him and performed her duties as his regent with distinction, despite being put under pressure by Ferrante to persuade Ercole to abandon both the Florentine cause and his \textit{condotta} with the allied army. Letters which passed between Ercole and Eleonora, and between Eleonora and Ercole’s secretary, Paolo Antonio Trotti, during the war have revealed that the challenges presented by Ercole’s decision to oppose his father-in-law in that war increased rather than diminished their affection for each other and confirmed their emotional dependence on each other. Finally, it may be suggested that their joint decision to send a

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{162} For Niccolò Sadoleto’s correspondence with Ercole and Eleonora; see ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Napoli, busta 2.
\textsuperscript{163} Medici, \textit{Lettere}, 4:340.
\end{footnotesize}
special envoy to the duke of Calabria in November 1479 was a major contribution to the commencement of the negotiations which ended the Pazzi War in March 1480.