VINTAGE

APRIL BLOOD

LAURO MARTINES

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ABOUT THE BOOK

In April 1478, a plot to murder the two heads of the powerful Medici family dramatically miscarried. The younger of the two brothers was killed, but Lorenzo the Magnificent, the brilliant poet and connoisseur escaped. A bloodbath followed and all of Italy was at once affected as it emerged that the Pope, the King of Naples, and the Duke of Urbino were deeply implicated in the plot, and that binding treaties required Milan and Venice to assist Florence.

If the conspirators had succeeded and Lorenzo had been killed the future of the Medici family and, indeed, of the Florentine state would have been utterly transformed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

One of the world’s foremost authorities on the Italian Renaissance, Lauro Martines was born in Chicago, has a Ph.D. from Harvard University, but has been living in London since 1970. Until recently he communted to Los Angeles, where he was Professor of European History at the University of California. He and his wife, the novelist Julia O’Faolain, lived for some years in Florence.

His best known books include *Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence* (1968), *Society and History in English Renaissance Verse* (1985), *An Italian Renaissance Sextet: Six Tales in Historical Context* (1994), *Strong Words: Writing and Social Strain in the Italian Renaissance* (2001), and *Power and Imagination*, now available in Pimlico.

For a delightful laity, friends in London
and why not for my enemies too
heralds of will and energy

APRIL BLOOD

Florence and the Plot Against the Medici

LAURO MARTINES

PIMLICO

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Detail from Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Confirmation of the Rule of St Francis*. Church of Santa Trinita, Sassetti Chapel, Florence. (AKG Berlin/S. Domingie)

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Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. (AKG London/Orsi Battaglini)

The Pazzi Palace, Florence. (Archivi Alinari)

The Medici Palace, Florence. (Scala)

Andrea del Verrocchio, *Bust of Giuliano de' Medici*. (Andrew W. Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington)

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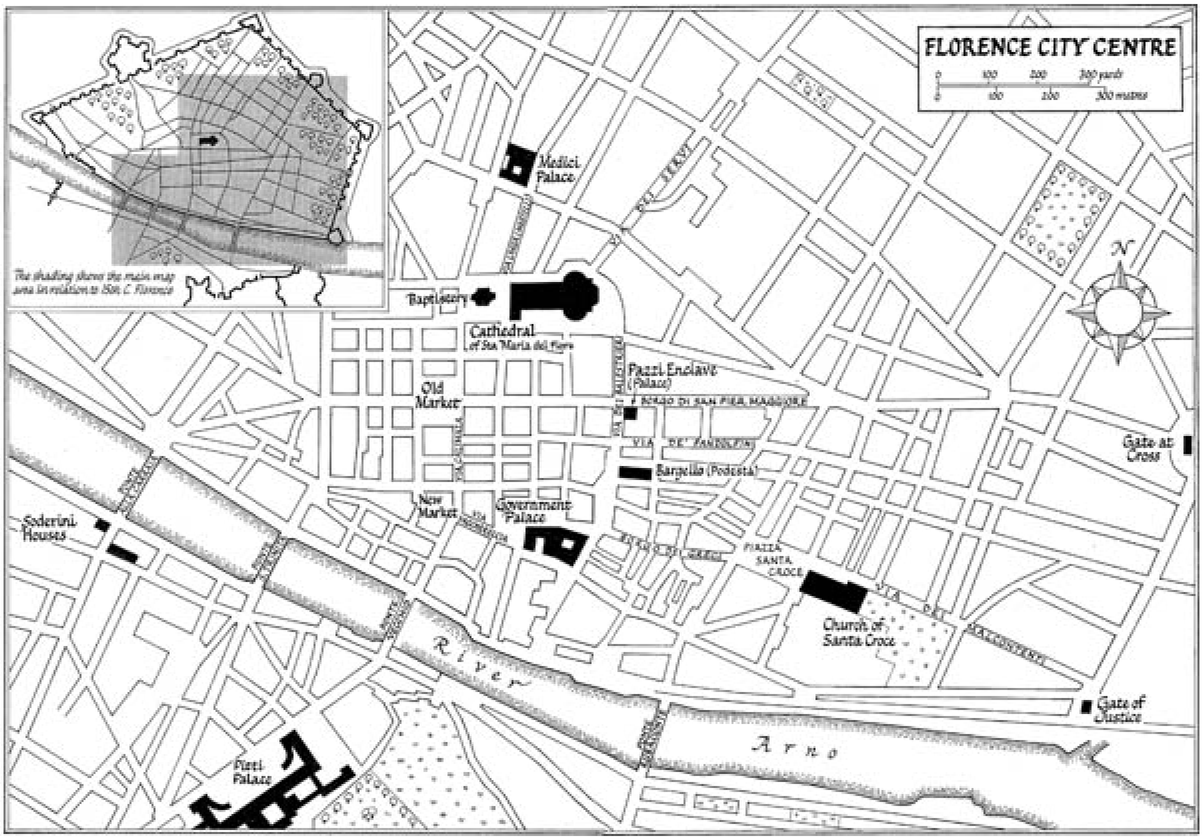
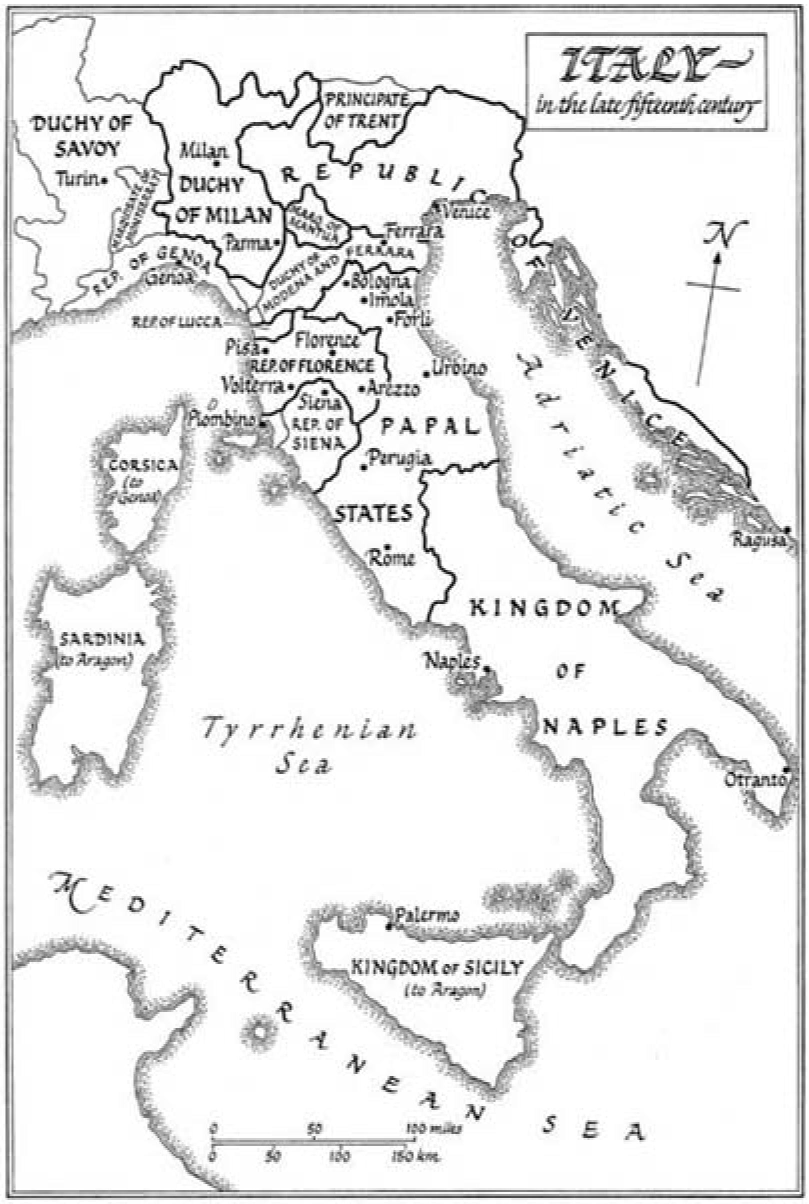
Death mask of Lorenzo. Medici-Riccardi Palace, Florence. (Scala)

Bust of Cardinal Giovanni de’ Medici, ascribed to Antonio de’ Benintendi. (Courtesy of the Trustees of the Victoria & Albert Museum)


FLORENCE CITY CENTRE
0 100 200 300 yards
0 100 200 300 metres
N
The shading shows the main map area in relation to 15th C. Florence
Medici Palace
VIA DEI SERVI
Baptistery
Cathedral of Sta Maria del Fiore
Pazzi Enclave (Palace)
BORGO DI SAN PIER MAGGIORE
VIA DE' PANDOLFINI
Old Market
Bargello (Podestà)
New Market
Government Palace
BORGO DEI GRECI
PIAZZA SANTA CROCE
Church of Santa Croce
VIA DEI MALCONTENTI
Gate at Cross
Gate of Justice
Soderini Houses
River
Arno
Pitti Palace


ITALY—
in the late fifteenth century
DUCHY OF SAVOY
Turin
MARQUISATE OF MONTFERRAT
Milan
DUCHY OF MILAN
Parma
PRINCIPATE OF TRENT
REPUBLIC OF VENICE
Venice
MARQ. OF MANTUA
Ferrara
DUCHY OF MODENA AND FERRARA
REP. OF GENOA
Genoa
REP. OF LUCCA
Bologna
Imola
Forli
Pisa
Florence
REP. OF FLORENCE
Volterra
Arezzo
Urbino
Siena
REP. OF SIENA
Piombino
PAPAL STATES
Perugia
Rome
CORSICA (to Genoa)
SARDINIA (to Aragon)
Adriatic Sea
Ragusa
KINGDOM OF NAPLES
Naples
Otranto
Tyrrhenian Sea
Palermo
KINGDOM OF SICILY (to Aragon)
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
N
0 50 100 miles
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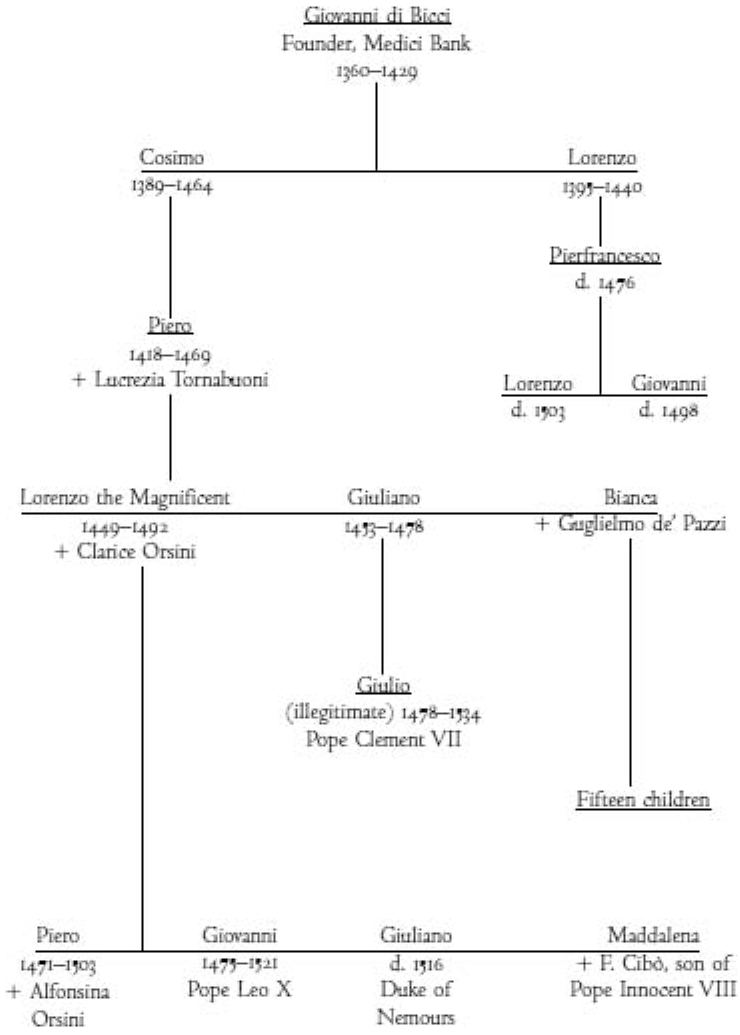
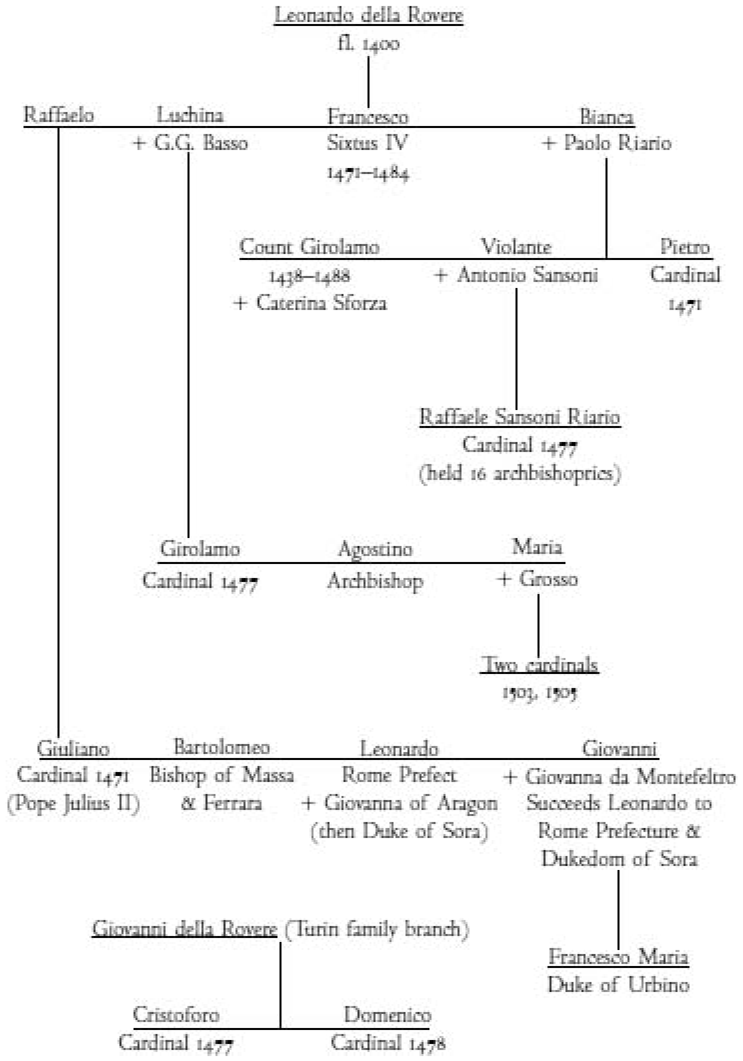
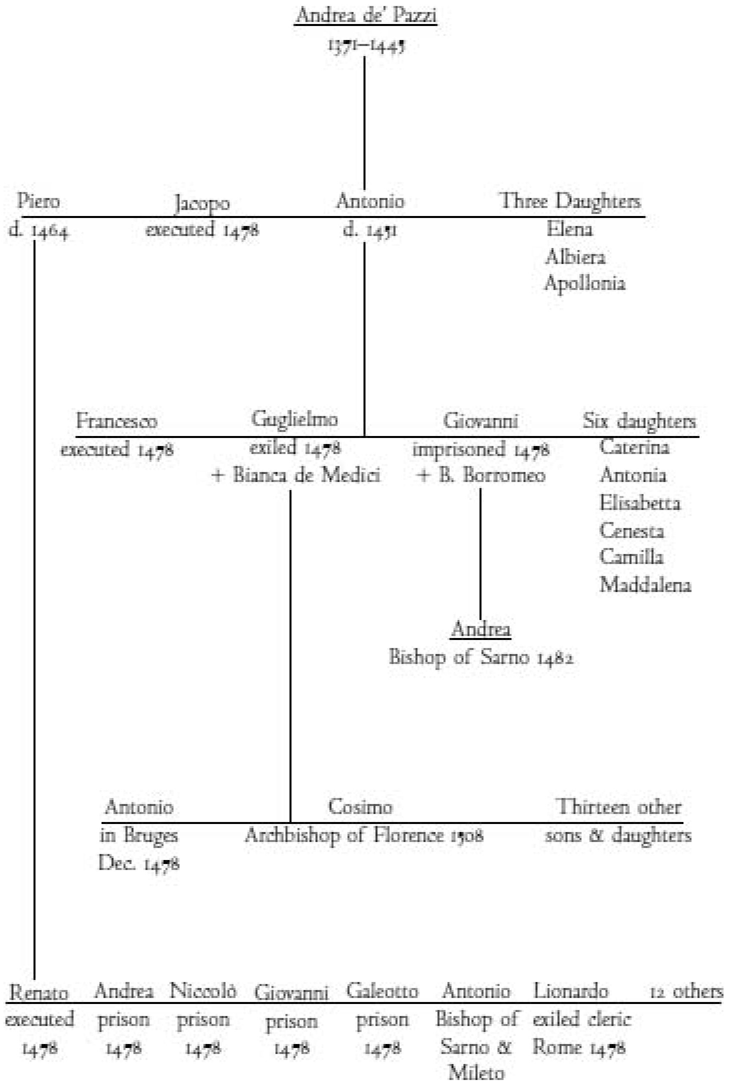
The Medici Family


Giovanni di Bicci
Founder, Medici Bank
1360–1429
Cosimo
1389–1464
Lorenzo
1395–1440
Pierfrancesco
d. 1476
Piero
1418–1469
+ Lucrezia Tornabuoni
Lorenzo
d. 1503
Giovanni
d. 1498
Lorenzo the Magnificent
1449–1492
+ Clarice Orsini
Giuliano
1453–1478
Bianca
+ Guglielmo de' Pazzi
Giulio
(illegitimate) 1478–1534
Pope Clement VII
Fifteen children
Piero
1471–1503
+ Alfonsina
Orsini
Giovanni
1475–1521
Pope Leo X
Giuliano
d. 1516
Duke of
Nemours
Maddalena
+ F. Cibò, son of
Pope Innocent VIII

The Della Rovere Family (of Pope Sixtus IV)


Leonardo della Rovere
fl. 1400
Raffaelo
Luchina
+ G.G. Basso
Francesco
Sixtus IV
1471–1484
Bianca
+ Paolo Riario
Count Girolamo
1438–1488
+ Caterina Sforza
Violante
+ Antonio Sansoni
Pietro
Cardinal
1471
Raffaele Sansoni Riario
Cardinal 1477
(held 16 archbishoprics)
Girolamo
Cardinal 1477
Agostino
Archbishop
Maria
+ Grosso
Two cardinals
1503, 1505
Giuliano
Cardinal 1471
(Pope Julius II)
Bartolomeo
Bishop of Massa
& Ferrara
Leonardo
Rome Prefect
+ Giovanna of Aragon
(then Duke of Sora)
Giovanni
+ Giovanna da Montefeltro
Succeeds Leonardo to
Rome Prefecture &
Dukedom of Sora
Giovanni della Rovere (Turin family branch)
Francesco Maria
Duke of Urbino
Cristoforo
Cardinal 1477
Domenico
Cardinal 1478

The Pazzi Family


Andrea de' Pazzi
1371–1445
Piero
d. 1464
Jacopo
executed 1478
Antonio
d. 1451
Three Daughters
Elena
Albiera
Apollonia
Francesco
executed 1478
Guglielmo
exiled 1478
+ Bianca de Medici
Giovanni
imprisoned 1478
+ B. Borromeo
Six daughters
Caterina
Antonia
Elisabetta
Cenesta
Camilla
Maddalena
Andrea
Bishop of Sarno 1482
Antonio
in Bruges
Dec. 1478
Cosimo
Archbishop of Florence 1508
Thirteen other
sons & daughters
Renato
executed
1478
Andrea
prison
1478
Niccolò
prison
1478
Giovanni
prison
1478
Galeotto
prison
1478
Antonio
Bishop of
Sarno &
Mileto
Lionardo
exiled cleric
Rome 1478
12 others

Personaggi

Medici:

Lorenzo the Magnificent: quasi-lord of Florence, 1469–92

Giuliano: Lorenzo’s brother, murdered, April 1478

Cosimo: Lorenzo’s grandfather, top man in Florentine state, 1434–64

Piero (‘the Gouty’), Lorenzo’s father, unofficial head of state, 1464–69

Pazzi:

Messer Jacopo: banker, merchant, leading plotter

Francesco: banker, merchant, leading plotter, Messer Jacopo’s nephew

Guglielmo: Francesco’s brother, also Lorenzo de’ Medici’s brother-in-law

Renato: first cousin to Guglielmo and Francesco

Others:

Francesco Salviati: Archbishop of Pisa, leading plotter

Count Girolamo Riario: Lord of Imola and Forlì, Sixtus IV’s nephew, plotter

Montesecco, Count of: soldier in service of Pope and Count Girolamo, plotter

Pope Sixtus IV (1471–84): covert backer of the plot

Cardinal of San Giorgio (Raffaele Sansoni Riario): student, nephew to Sixtus IV

King Ferrante of Naples (1458–94): covert backer of the plot

Duke Federigo of Urbino (d. 1482): covert backer of the plot

Bernardo Bandini Baroncelli: Florentine banker, probable Pazzi employee, plotter

Jacopo Bracciolini: classical scholar, tutor to the Cardinal of San Giorgio, plotter

Poliziano: classical scholar, poet, Lorenzo’s protégé, author of a booklet on the plot

Prologue

ON A SUNDAY in April 1478, in the cathedral of Florence, a band of conspirators tried to murder the two heads of the Medici family: Lorenzo the Magnificent, unofficial head of state, and his younger brother Giuliano. Known as ‘the Pazzi Conspiracy’, the plot failed, and in reprisal a bloodbath followed. Thus my title *April Blood*.

Here was a tale of men driven by demonic energies; of a proud and brilliant young politician and poet, the ‘Magnificent’ Lorenzo de’ Medici; of a pope who could not keep himself from heaping the wealth and offices of the Church on his own nephews; an archbishop who was ready to found his career on murder, a shrewd king of Naples, hired professional soldiers, and a talented Florentine family of enormous wealth – the Pazzi. The plot, however, was also a hinge for the history of Florence, with a lively republic on one side of the turn, stretching back to the thirteenth century, and on the other, after 1478, an incipient principality or ‘tyranny’. But the swing itself, with its blood and immediate consequences, pivoted on an anxious and layered episode – cruel, framed by a High Mass, resounding, and with a tragic note for the human spirit.

If sounder reasons were needed for a book on the Conspiracy, there is also the fact that the opening burst of events in the cathedral was overtaken, within a day or two, by the pressing interests and voices of Italy’s five great states (Map 2). For the Medici had strong political ties with the Duchy of Milan and its ruling Sforza family, and Lorenzo looked to the Sforza as protectors and patrons. Florence also had an alliance with the Republic of Venice, which bound the Venetians, in any emergency, to come to the military aid of the Florentine Republic.

In a startling discovery, however, it now emerged from behind the scenes that the two big powers to the south of Florence, the Papal State and the Kingdom of Naples, were deeply implicated in the assassination plot. Pope Sixtus IV and King Ferrante were pursuing political aims in central Italy, all along Florence’s frontiers; and if the ebbing Republic of Florence could be shored up against the power of a budding Medicean lordship, then their goals would be more readily attainable. In these weavings, the two rulers had also enlisted the help of two Florentine neighbours, the tiny Republic of Siena and the Duke of Urbino, one of the foremost mercenary captains of the day. The result of the April Plot was to be the Pazzi War, or War of the Pazzi Conspiracy: nearly two years of armed conflict, incendiary words, and refined treachery.

The Italian Renaissance was not alien to political violence, especially since explosive anger and tumults against authority may be the fruit of the vital energies or alert stance of a people. The shape of early-modern Italy was cut and cast in the late Middle Ages (*c.* 1050–1350), in a cluttered sequence of uprisings and wars against German kings and emperors, popes, feudal magnates, and outside invaders. By the end of the fourteenth century, the Italian peninsula had hardened into its classic arrangement of independent powers: Venice, Milan, Florence, the papacy, and the kingdom of Naples, each with its constellation of subject lands and cities. Lesser or little states, such as the lordship of Ferrara, or the dwarf republics of Lucca and Siena, survived nervously beside their bigger neighbours; and the great port of Genoa lay under the rule of Milan. It was a setting that nourished the art of diplomacy and the gradual rise of the resident ambassador, soon to become a standard feature of the diplomatic process.

Yet rivalry for lands, troops, and leadership endured; the call to arms was common, if not inevitable; ruthless political genius and strong nerves were prime necessities; so too were discretion and reason; and marriage as an instrument of politics became policy. All these, in varying measures, entered into the April Plot, the ensuing Pazzi War, and Lorenzo de' Medici's more domineering achievements of the 1480s.

In regular revenue and the possible numbers of its professional soldiers, Florence was the weakest of the peninsula's major states, despite the city's many bankers and exceptional position as a capital of finance. War, therefore, could be especially hard on Florentines and their 'bourgeois' republic. But the city, as is well known, was neither weak in spirit nor in cultural energies.

Here was Machiavelli (b. 1469), growing up in a political milieu whose tensions would carry Florence toward an explosive renewal of its republican freedoms in 1494–95. He was a witness to the intense controversies – reactions against Medicean domination – of that troubled decade, and they would leave their stamp on the conceptual language of his political writings. Meanwhile, in what seemed a more routine world, Verrocchio, the Pollaiuolo brothers, and other Florentine artists were pursuing their work for private patrons and religious houses. Two or three years after the April Plot, Botticelli produced his *Primavera*, a sparkling picture with recondite references for an elite of connoisseurs. The serenity and elevated tone of many religious pictures of the period, such as by Ghirlandaio and Botticelli, containing the portraits of contemporaries, were arguably exercises in transcendence for patrons: works that constructed moments of surpassing personal peace or perfection, in stark opposition to the brutal strains of politics and the scramble for place and favour. The poetry of the age, including Lorenzo de'

Medici's, has hymns to the country against the ambitions, greed, and moral dirty work of the city.

Though all these matters will loom silently along the edges of this history, I shall not be able to broach them. But we may for a moment here have a glimpse of the ubiquity of politics in Florence, and its imprint on high culture, by noting that it made continuous contact with the revival and study of classical letters ('humanism'). In the hunt for professorships at the University of Florence/Pisa, writers and scholars had to court political patrons and get them to intervene. Appointment to the city's top secretarial offices, strictly reserved for literary men and intellectuals, also required the intervention of politicians. Humanists translated classical writings from Greek into Latin, or Latin into the vernacular, very often by working on commission for rich and influential citizens. They dedicated unsolicited translations and their own writings to the leading men in government and politics, while also looking about for classical works that would appeal to wealthy merchants, bankers, politicians, and neighbouring princes. In this sense, they were striving to popularise parts of the classical syllabus, hoping to disseminate select voices from the ancient world – Quintilian, Livy, Plato, Plutarch, Pliny, and so forth.

But after Cosimo de' Medici's return from political exile in the autumn of 1434, no Florentine family was ever again to match or even approach the Medici in their mounting harvest of dedications, translations, and poetic accolades. In the office of promoting and flattering, the seductive power of literature gathered round them. As they seized power, they came to expect praise and then, by their bearing, to require it, though in a glide that also aroused political loathing. So it happened that to have a pen out for hire in such a setting, as Poliziano did (Figure 1) in his *Memoir of the Conspiracy*, forced writers and scholars into a traffic of ideas and degrees of partisanship. Whether or not they themselves directly engaged in political violence, they moved almost constantly in its shadows.

In the bulk of recent historical work on Renaissance Florence, politics has been much played down or even ignored, as if there were something so nasty and ignoble about it, or just plain grey, that the less said about it the better. 'Base and dirty' it may have been, but never grey, and we push it aside at the risk of missing the key point of departure for understanding the history of Italian Renaissance cities. Small, packed, observant, industrious, and sharply circumscribed by city walls (Venice by water), each of them was an arena for politics: a space in which the power of the state was omnipresent.

Here, every resident was touched, and touched daily, by decisions that had been made in a government palace never more than a few hundred metres away from most citizens. The sights and sounds of that authoritative presence were everywhere – in trumpeting heralds, uniformed guardsmen, court summonses, resounding official bells, grand arrivals and departures, and the livery of rushing officials and messengers. In addition to the property taxes and 'forced loans' paid by citizens, all contracts and comestibles carried a tax; dress of the more expensive sort was regulated by law; every night brought curfews; torture was common; capital punishment was knowingly turned into a public spectacle; and the intrusiveness of government couriers put much of the private business of families into the eyes or ears of neighbours. With an admixture of the teachings of late-medieval Christianity, this urban arena was the crucible for the making of social and individual identities, no less than for the formation of art and ideas.

* * *

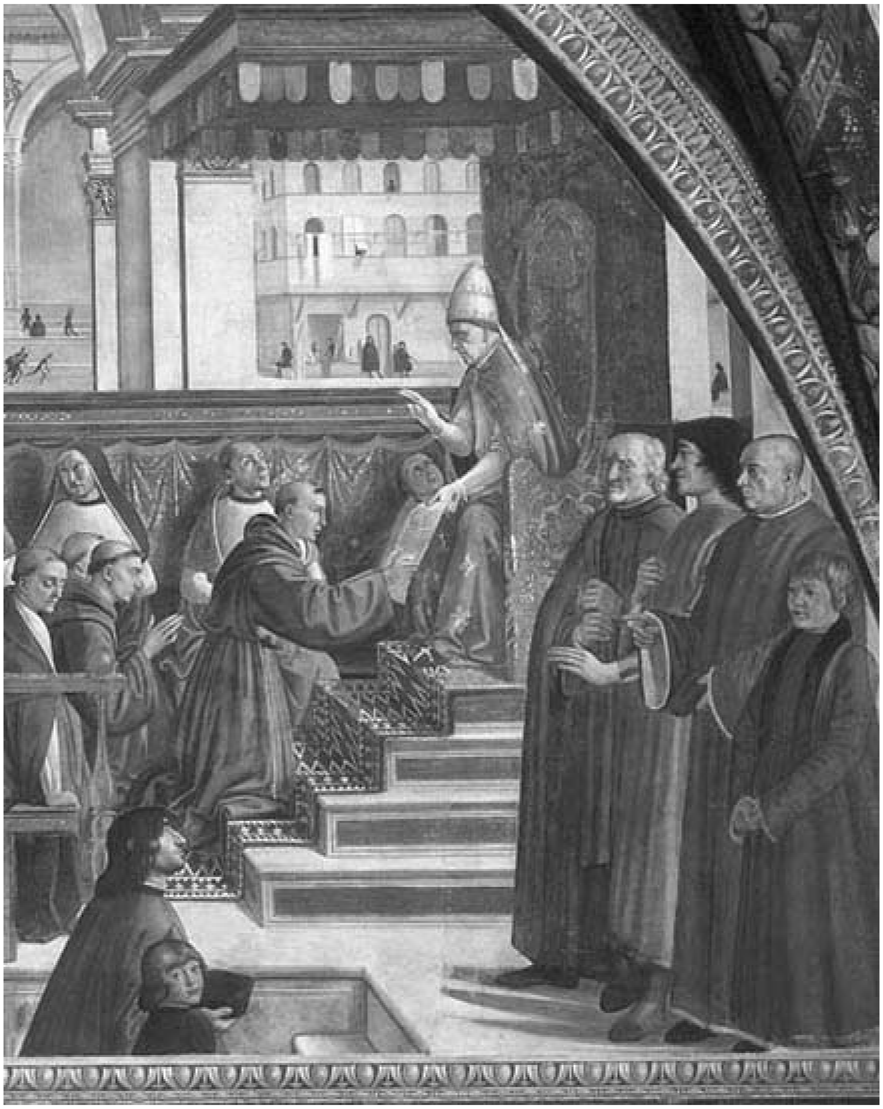


Fig. 1 Detail from Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Confirmation of the Rule of St Francis*, depicting Poliziano on the stairs looking up to the black-haired Lorenzo.

Since Pope Sixtus will figure strongly in the key chapters, readers should know that the pope was not only the acknowledged head of Western Christendom and the Vicar of Christ on earth in theological terms, but also the supreme head of a secular state, in a region that straddled the Italian peninsula from Rome to the Adriatic. In this incarnation, he was much like any other Italian ruler, flanked by government officials, law courts, police magistracies, and tax collectors, in addition to having armies and diplomats under his control.

Of the importance of cardinals, who will also have a place in this story, suffice it to say that they sprang usually from the ranks of the eminent urban, feudal, and princely families. They were the electors of the pope and were themselves appointed by popes. When a cardinal was not already rich in his own right, it was the business of the pope to see to it that the man's ecclesiastical income enabled him to live in style, to command a train of servants, and to dispense patronage. Every region, every city, sought the Roman advocacy of one or more cardinals, in efforts to obtain a never-ending stream of favours, ranging from the right to tax priests and friars to the winning of lawsuits in Rome, not to mention the search for ecclesiastical place by clerics back home. Cardinals were the magnates of the Church.

My expression 'Lord Priors', to be used throughout the book, refers to Florence's governing council: the *Signoria*, *Signori*, or lords. They were a body of eight priors and a Gonfalonier of Justice, the head of state, chosen to serve in office for only two months. The city thus, surprisingly, had six changes of government per year. But the system normally provided remarkable stability, owing both to the habit of almost daily consultation with the most experienced members of the political class, and to the close involvement of citizens, who could entertain the hope or the expectation of rotating through the top offices.

The larger consequences of the Pazzi Conspiracy are matter for deeper reflection and my concluding pages.

CHAPTER ONE

Conspiracy

Revenge

‘THE DISH OF revenge’, they say in France, ‘is best eaten cold.’ And Lorenzo de’ Medici finally ate the last of his in April 1488, exactly ten years after the sensational attempt to kill him in Florence at High Mass. In the town of Forlì, some fifty miles away and to the north-east, across mountainous country, one of the prime conspirators against him, and the only one still alive, was slashed to death in the government palace and his naked corpse was thrown down into the central square, to be gaped at and violated by angry citizens. He was Count Girolamo Riario, Lord of Imola and Forlì, a nephew of the late Pope Sixtus IV.

The assassins wrote to Lorenzo a few days later, complimenting themselves on wreaking vengeance for him.[1] But he was not the engineer of the deed, despite the fact that, working through agents and diplomats, he had made a point of following the Count’s every significant move for ten years. He had paid to sow discontent in his lands; he had a hand in three previous attempts on the Count’s life; and he had laboured to thwart his ambitions by means of Florentine diplomacy. So as the first top man in Florence to get the news from Forlì, he was bound to be the first in rejoicing. The taste for vengeance was a virile duty in Renaissance Italy, and Lorenzo, though an outstanding poet and connoisseur, was not so delicately constituted as to balk at brutal revenge. He was also a political boss.

With its cluster of about 8000 or 9000 souls, Forlì was very different from spirited Florence, with a post-plague population of five times as many. But the ways of assassination – poison, strangulation, or a steel blade – were the same. And when dealt out to public figures, or for reasons of state, death was often a theatre of ignominy, with bodies hanged from the windows of government buildings or cast like carrion into central squares. In cities where the tight community and the individual were closely joined, punishment for capital crime against the prince or the public good had to be bloody and had to be seen to be so.

Count Girolamo was tumbled by the foe of many a government: taxes and the need for ready cash.[2] The head of a mini-state in the Romagna of the popes, the most volatile part of Italy, this petty ruler had even been forced to pawn his wife's jewels in Bologna and far-off Genoa. He was seen by many as a man who had risen from nothing, in having come from relatively modest circumstances and an obscure village near Genoa. His uncle, Pope Sixtus IV (d. 1484), had all but made him in a day by putting Imola and Forlì – autonomous fiefs in papal territory – into his hands, and then by clinching a marriage for him with the fourteen-year-old Caterina Sforza, a bastard daughter of the Duke of Milan, Galeazzo Maria, himself assassinated in 1476.

These slippery circumstances added more risk to the dangers of the neighbouring Apennine mountains, a stronghold for bandits and unruly lords, who often threatened the security of Romagnol rulers and were the main cause of Count Girolamo's greatest expense: a small body of guardsmen and an extra company of 100 soldiers. But the treachery of passion could prevail against even these. When his fiscal agents, two brothers from the Orsi family, as well as two of his captains, fell out with him in heated quarrels over money, the four resolved to kill him, expecting that popular discontent would erupt in their favour, especially because one of their principal motives was the spur of a hated land tax, to be directly imposed on the class of landowners. But first there were the immediate spurs. On being pressed one day for back wages by one of his soldiers, the Count had shouted, ‘Get out of my sight or I’ll have you hanged.’ To which the captain had replied, ‘O My lord, one hangs thieves and traitors, and I am not that sort. I deserve to die sword in hand, like any other brave man at arms.’

As local noblemen, the two Orsi brothers enjoyed the privilege of ‘the gilded key’, meaning that they had the right to call on Riario without invitation or preliminaries. So, having made their plans, they went to his palace just after dinner on Monday, 14 April 1488, and finding him with a few servitors in the ornate Hall of Nymphs, one of the two men who had entered greeted Riario with the thrust of a short sword *(squarcina)*. The victim’s cry and rush to scurry under a table, to protect himself, brought two other men into the hall to help finish him off, as his terrorised attendants fled. Other conspirators joined in and now, nine in all, with some of them posted down below at the base of the palace staircase, they repelled the late arrivals who sought to stand up for Count Girolamo and his family. A little later, as though performing a well-known ritual, two men stripped the dead Count of his clothing and threw his body down into the principal piazza, where a crowd quickly collected to hail the deed and offer kisses to the conspirators. Once Caterina Sforza Riario and her children, who had been in another part of the palace, were taken prisoner, a mob sacked the building and an immense fortune, most of it in jewels, vanished.

Five days later, now worried, nervous, and casting about for help, the ‘tax farmers’ (fiscal agents), Checco and Ludovico Orsi, addressed a letter to ‘Our Magnificent and Most Revered Lorenzo [de’ Medici]’, written in part, they say, ‘to satisfy our debt [to you]’.[3] They go on to ask for his advice and to offer their version of the gruesome assassination. Remembering that ‘this Nero [Count Girolamo]’ had ‘the impudence to smear his hands with the blood of your lofty house’, they rehearse his sins, noting that he had no regard for God or the saints, and that he had been ‘a drinker of the blood of poor men’. Lorenzo replied with such speed that within two days, on 21 April, his secretary, a certain Stefano from the Florentine fortress of Castrocaro, had already met with the Orsi brothers. Stefano drafted a letter to his master, describing his meeting with them and recounting the particulars of the assassination. The people of Forlì, he writes, were happy about the Count’s death. All wanted the Church to take over the reins of government there, and all said that they would rather have their bodies hacked up into quarters than let the city fall back into any other hands. He had assured the Orsi that Lorenzo would offer them his complete support, including the promise to defend their good name and actions to Pope Innocent VIII, Florence’s closest ally. In fact, in that very year, Innocent was to become father-in-law to Lorenzo’s third daughter. Stefano also quotes the words of one of the brothers: ‘I am the slave of the Magnificent Lorenzo, together with all my family, and if I should never in my life do anything else, I am content to have avenged the innocent blood of his brother.’

Lorenzo gave no written support to the Orsi brothers in his own hand: conspire in cloak-and-dagger doings he might, but to offer proof of it was, in a phrase of the period, ‘another pair of sleeves’.

Ten days later, whipped up with fear and on the point of flight, the Orsi again wrote to Lorenzo; it was a plea for military aid; but being a political animal to the roots of his being, and his revenge now achieved, Lorenzo did not make a move.[4] Uneasy about Milan–Sforza designs, neither he nor Pope Innocent, for all the Church’s claims to Forlì, dispatched troops to support the Forlivesi and to enforce the rule of the papal governor. A small army from Milan and Bologna was already on the outskirts of Forlì, with orders to take it back for the widow, Caterina Sforza Riario, who had gained cunning access to the Rivaldino fortress at one end of the city and was safely billeted there. Threatening to bombard Forlì with rounds of artillery, and having already damaged a few houses, she saved the city from a savage sacking at the hands of the approaching army, blame for which would have been pinned to her. Now, however, she also would have her revenge, if only in part and not yet as a cold dish. Lorenzo de’ Medici, meanwhile, was kept fully informed.

Frightened by the prospect of a murdering, pillaging, fornicating army, the Forlivesi had swung completely around in their loyalties and were ready to support anyone who would save them. This meant Caterina. And as if whisked in by ghosts, some of the objects that had been stolen from the sacked palazzo reappeared. The jewels, however, would not again be seen, for on the night of 29 April, two weeks after their assassination of the Count, the Orsi brothers and their closest collaborators fled from the city with the best of the loot.

When Caterina took possession of Forlì on 30 April, her eldest son, the ambitiously named Octavian, was the first to parade around the main square. Next, speaking the symbolic language of power, she entered the city in triumph, attended by noblemen in armour and magnificent dress, and riding between two files of soldiers posted along her route. Terror gripped the men who had most compromised themselves with the two tax farmers and who had failed to flee. That day Caterina’s mercenaries drew blood. The houses of the Orsi, of the soldiers Pansecchi and Ronchi, and of others were looted and burned. A series of massacres followed on 1 and 2 May, terminating in the principal square, which seemed to be turned into ‘a bloody lake’. Andrea, the eighty-five-year-old father of the Orsi brothers, was made to witness the total destruction of his house, swiftly levelled by 400 men. Then, tied to a plank and the tail of a horse, he was dragged around the government square three times, his face pressed to the ground. Later, he was quartered; his intestines were thrown about in the piazza, ‘and one of those dogs of a soldier’, the chronicler Cobelli reports, ‘grabbed the heart, cut it out . . . put it up to his mouth, and bit into it, and I, seeing this, fled.’

The significance of such symbolic cannibalism will come forth in a later chapter. In the course of the blood riot, as though to compensate for the butchery, Caterina had Count Girolamo’s body disinterred and done up to lie in state for three days in the church of San Francesco. Hours after the Count’s assassination, in the watches of the night, a friar had gone out to collect the lone body from the piazza. He was connected, ironically, with the religious confraternity whose mission it was to comfort and pray for those on their way to the gallows.

What the mere facts as related above do not reveal is that both Lorenzo de’ Medici and Pope Innocent had another most particular reason for applauding Riario’s removal from the scene.[5] Once the frank keeper of a mistress, though not (it was said) after he had taken holy orders, the Holy Father was also an unholy father and grandfather: he had sired a family, and Lorenzo had given his daughter Maddalena in marriage to Innocent’s son

Franceschetto. The Pope thought about creating a small state for that son by handing him the governments of Imola and Forlì, and possibly even of Faenza; but pursuing this hope had promised to be impossible during the lifetime of Count Girolamo, who looked both to Venice for military help and, through his wife Caterina, to the powerful intervention of her uncle, the Lord of Milan, Ludovico Sforza. Now, however, with Girolamo suddenly out of the way, the Pope could seek to invest Franceschetto with the two cities that were, after all, his nominal feudal territory as head of the Church. And Lorenzo, ever mindful of the Medici name and of ‘our house’, as he loved to call it, seemed ready to assist Innocent in this enterprise. Maddalena would then be ‘Countess’ of Imola and Forlì. He would indeed have liked this, but without a papal presence, and somehow without Innocent; for no patriotic Florentine really wanted the might of the Church to be exercised in the Church lands that bordered on Florentine territory. Lorenzo, therefore, dragged his feet, but meanwhile Florence grabbed the Castle of Piancaldoli in the province of Imola.

Seven weeks after the murder of Count Girolamo there was another assassination on a similar scale.[6] Lorenzo de’ Medici’s chief dependant in the Romagna was stabbed to death in an ugly tangle of interests that opposed Florence, Milan, the Church, and Venice. Galeotto Manfredi, lord of the neighbouring town of Faenza, was a violent man who did not bother to conceal his adulterous roisterings from his wife Francesca, a proud lady from the ruling Bentivoglio family of Bologna. Feigning illness one day, and with her father’s likely connivance, she summoned Galeotto to her bedroom, where he was promptly assaulted and murdered by four servitors, three of them having been hidden under her splendid bed. Her marriage to Galeotto had been brokered by none other than Lorenzo himself,