

**Europa e Italia.
Studi in onore di Giorgio Chittolini**

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Piombino between the great powers in the late fifteenth century

by David Abulafia

1. Piombino has been unfairly neglected by historians. Although the Appiano lordship was small, consisting of Piombino itself, some small towns in the hinterland and, importantly, the island of Elba, this *signoria* lay in a strategically vital position, looking across the straits between Tuscany and Corsica, and effectively controlling the entrance into the waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea¹. In addition, Elba, *isola del ferro*, was a major source of iron, as it had been since the Etruscan era, and the merchants of Piombino (not to mention its pirates) navigated the waters as far south as Tunis, where traders from Piombino enjoyed commercial privileges similar to those conferred on the Genoese, Pisans and Florentines². However, the history of Piombino and its territory still cannot be written without close reference to seventeenth and eighteenth-century sources. A brief survey in reverse order of the literature explains why. In the last century one of the most indefatigable historians of the principality was Romualdo Cardarelli, who was employed by the Italian railways, and took every opportunity to collect archival material concerning the town on his travels around Italy on official business³. However, his essays on the subject did not culminate in an overall survey of the city's history nor in a history of its Appiano lords. One of the best surveys of the history of Piombino, by Cappelletti, dates from 1897; it remains the starting point for

¹ P. Ghelardoni, *Il territorio piombinese nel XV secolo*, in *Popolonia e Piombino in età medievale e moderna*, ed. M.L. Ceccarelli Lemut and G. Garzella, Pisa 1996 (Biblioteca del Bollettino Storico Pisano, 44), p. 83-89.

² D. Abulafia, *From Tunis to Piombino: piracy and trade in the Tyrrhenian Sea, 1397-1472*, in *The experience of crusading*, vol. 2, *Defining the Crusader Kingdom*, ed. P. Edbury and J. Phillips, Cambridge 2003, p. 275-297; E. Massart, *La signoria di Piombino e gli Stati Barbareschi*, in «Bollettino storico pisano», 39 (1970), p. 69-118; also, on trade: P. Meli and S. Tognetti, *Il principe e il mercante nella Toscana del Quattrocento: il magnifico signore di Piombino Jacopo III Appiani e le aziende Marchiani di Pisa*, Firenze 2006.

³ R. Cardarelli, *Baldaccio d'Anghiari e la Signoria di Piombino nel 1440 e 1441 con prefazione e introduzione sulla storia dello Stato di Piombino dagli inizi fino a tutto il 1439*, Roma 1922, a work based on his *tesi di laurea* which contains a fearsome invective against a journal editor who had failed to keep the promise to publish the entire work. However, neither his projected grand history of Piombino under the Appiani, nor his history of the Spanish *Presidios* on the Tuscan coast, saw the light of day; see *La Biblioteca di Romualdo Cardarelli*, 2 vols., Napoli 1994-1997.

modern studies⁴. The valuable dependency of the Appiano *signoria*, the island of Elba, has not been the subject of intense historical research since G.A. Ninci published his *Storia dell'isola dell'Elba* in honour of the island's new master, Napoleon Bonaparte, in 1815⁵. Ninci, like everyone before and after, relied heavily on the manuscript history of Piombino written in the seventeenth century, of which more shortly; but he also employed Sieneese and other Tuscan chronicles quite profitably. Still, when he departed from the established line it was mainly to embroider the sources with a touch of imagination. Ninci in turn looked to Cesaretti, who devoted two volumes to the principality in 1788-1789, making use of what he thought were the decisions of the *Consiglio* of Piombino, though in fact he relied on the summaries provided in the manuscript history of Piombino, preserved in Piombino (in a better copy) and in Pisa (in a less good one); but even the Piombino copy is thought not to have been written in the author's hand⁶.

This is still, though unpublished, an unrivalled source for events in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Its full title is *Memorie le più antiche che si sono potute ricavare della città di Piombino*, and it was for some time attributed to Pier Domenico Corsi, a sixteenth-century notable, an attribution which Ottavio Banti considered «non controllata e probabilmente non controllabile»; the attribution is also problematic since it implies that most of the work was written some time before its terminal date of 1634 and completed by another author, who was nonetheless so expert in imitating his predecessor that there is no sign of a join in the text. The *Memorie* are, again to cite Banti, «un testo annalistico»; the history they recount goes up to the end of the Appiano dynasty in 1634, which provides a *terminus post quem* for the writing of the work, but they are based on a close reading of the *Libri di Consigli* still to be found in the Piombino archives, on historians such as Guicciardini, Giovio and Malavolti and on the writings, for the late Quattrocento, of Pope Pius II. It has been argued that the manuscript was complete by 1706, but this depends on fine arguments about dating systems that are not particularly convincing: that the author was using the old Pisan dating system which was dropped that year. Still, it appears to date from the mid to late seventeenth century or, at the latest, from the start of the eighteenth century, for it was written by an author who had a deep affection for the Appiano dynasty, which suggests that he may well have lived the early part of his life under their rule. The author appears to have been not merely

⁴ L. Cappelletti, *Storia della Città e Stato di Piombino dalle origini fino all'anno 1814*, Livorno 1897.

⁵ G. Ninci, *Storia dell'isola di Elba dedicata a Sua Maestà Napoleone il Grande Imperatore*, Portolongone 1898.

⁶ Biblioteca Civica Falesiana, Piombino, MS 139, entitled *Memorie le più antiche che si sono potute ricavare dalla Città di Piombino* [hereafter: MS 139]. On this MS, see O. Banti, *Di una storia manoscritta del principato di Piombino*, in *Populonia e Piombino in età medievale e moderna*, p. 91-98; A. Cesaretti, *Istoria del Principato di Piombino e osservazioni intorno ai diritti della Corona di Toscana sopra i castelli di Valle e Montone*, 2 vols., Firenze 1788.

from Piombino – that is clear – but also well connected with the city government, since he had access to the archives of the town.

It is fair to say that everything that has been written subsequently about the Appiano lordship in Piombino summarises or repeats the information given by this source⁷. It is difficult to stand back from it very far, even with the help of fifteenth-century materials. Inevitably this means that the emphasis falls on political history – on the succession to the *signoria*, or on great moments such as Alfonso of Aragon's siege of Piombino in 1448; however, this source is also quite voluble concerning the diplomatic and commercial ties between Piombino and the kings of Tunis, apparently attracted by the high drama of this difficult relationship. Documentary sources have been mobilised less enthusiastically, in part because the author of the manuscript can be seen to have used archival sources; and his work has thus been treated as an adequate substitute, chronicle and archive report in one. Yet, to take the example of Tunis, a handful of texts of treaties between Piombino and Tunis have survived, and they were edited first of all by the great Sicilian Arabist Michele Amari in the mid-nineteenth century. More ancient still is the history of Piombino written by Agostino Dati, bishop of Siena, around 1500, which combines a high classical style with an account of Piombino's relations with other Italian powers, and of the vicissitudes of the ruling dynasty⁸. Such sources as the decisions of the *Consiglio* preserved in Archivio Comunale di Piombino, the diplomatic correspondence between Piombino and Milan preserved in the Archivio di Stato in Milan, and possibly later material from Simancas, will all repay close attention from historians⁹. This article provides no more than a first attempt to integrate a small number of the Milanese documents into the wider history of the lordship of Piombino.

What must be stressed, then, is that the history of Piombino is not simply the tale of a small and remote town, local history without much resonance beyond the city's walls. The example of Piombino will help us understand how princely power often cooperated with traditional communal institutions in the government of a late medieval *signoria*: the *Anziani* of Piombino made their own decisions on important issues, working closely, however, with the prince, so that what emerged was a co-operative, dualistic government of prince and commune. Given the strategic importance of Elba, the struggle for control of the waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea in the age of Alfonso the Magnanimous and Ferrante of Naples closely involved the Appiano family in Piombino. Moreover, Piombino made some attempts to claim the commercial heritage of Pisa, now well past its prime; and, even if Florence was far

⁷ V. Petronio, *Cronistoria di Piombino e del suo Principato*, Siena 2006 (though compiled from 1943 onwards).

⁸ Agostino Dati, *Historia Plumbinensis*, in *Augustini Dati opera*, Siena 1503.

⁹ Archivio Comunale, Piombino, Libri di Consigli and Libri di Ragione; Archivio di Stato di Milano, Potenze Estere 313 [hereafter, ASM, PE 313], cited in the notes with the date as given (varying between the Milanese and Pisan systems, depending on whether the document originated in Piombino or Milan), but adjustments of date have been made in the text of this article.

more successful in filling Pisa's shoes, the Piombinese trade network reveals important features of fifteenth-century trade at a time of commercial recovery in the western Mediterranean.

2. Overshadowed by Siena and Florence in the early fifteenth century, Piombino became an ally of the largest Italian state in the second half of the Quattrocento. By the 1450s Piombino had entered the sphere of influence of the Aragonese kings of Naples; the lord of Piombino was paying tribute to King Ferrante, and a stable relationship had developed between the Aragonese dynasty in the south and the Appiani, despite severe tensions between the Appiani and Ferrante's father (most famously, the siege of Piombino by Alfonso the Magnanimous in 1448). This relationship has been the subject of another article by me in a volume in memory of Philip Jones, and I shall not reproduce the arguments here, except to point out that the relationship developed gradually, and that Piombino saw Naples as a powerful counterweight against predatory powers in and beyond Tuscany, notably the Florentines¹⁰. Milan lay over the horizon, but there was a steady stream of respectful correspondence between the Appiani and the Sforzas. Even after a warm relationship developed between the Neapolitan and the Milanese courts, the Sforzas remained sensitive to an extension of Neapolitan influence in northern Italy, and the prince of Piombino took care to explain his relationship with Naples to the duke of Milan, sending ambassador to him in summer, 1456. The lord of Piombino wished it to be known that he was not trying to upset the apple-cart of Italian politics, nor to damage the Peace of Lodi, and he had nothing but good memories of the friendship of the Sforzas¹¹. One way of encouraging the Sforzas to think well of the Appiani was to send them presents of falcons from Elba («questa mia insula del ferro»), or even to permit members of the Milanese dynasty to catch falcons on the territory of Piombino¹².

Issues of moment emerged particularly during the periods when Milan was overlord of Genoa, or competing to control the city, which, after periods of Visconti and French overlordship, lay under the suzerainty of the Sforzas between 1464 and 1478 and 1487 to 1499, although pro-French and pro-Angevin factions did not remain quiet during those years. For these dates mask a much more complex picture, of internal rivalries and of tensions between the Sforzas and Genoa even when they were its overlords¹³. Piombino's relationship with Genoa was also full of contradictions. Although the Genoese had, in the past, provided consular cover for the Piombinesi in

¹⁰ D. Abulafia, *The Mouse and the Elephant: relations between the kings of Naples and the lordship of Piombino in the fifteenth century*, in *Communes and Despots in late medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. J. Law and B. Paton, Aldershot 2010, p. 145-160.

¹¹ ASM, PE 313, 6 June 1456.

¹² ASM, PE 313, 4 July 1466; ASM, PE 313, 23 August 1469.

¹³ S.A. Epstein, *Genoa and the Genoese, 958-1528*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1996, p. 286-289.

Tunis, the relationship between *la Superba* and what the Genoese saw as an irritating minor competitor also had its low points. The Genoese aspired to control the Elba iron mines, and their interests in Corsica also clashed on occasion with the ambitions of the Appiani and their subjects (as early as 1401 Genoese intruders had tried to seize Elba). From 1455 Genoese businessmen held the concession to mine for iron on Elba, though the Medici acquired this right in 1477¹⁴. Piombino found itself sucked into bigger conflicts between the Catalans and the Genoese, which was especially difficult for them once Alfonso of Aragon had become king of Naples, and even more so once he and his son Ferrante had begun to receive tribute from Piombino. In the background lay the continuing rivalry between René of Anjou and Alfonso of Aragon over control of the kingdom of Naples. In 1453, ambassadors were sent to Toulon to persuade Alfonso's old enemy René of Anjou, to prevent Provençal corsairs from attacking Piombinese shipping. Piombino demanded the release of prisoners and merchandise seized by René's sailors. The costs of the embassy were to be met one third by the *signore*, one third by the commune and one third by Blasino (Biagino) Calefati, one of the most active merchants in Piombino¹⁵. In 1456 the problem was that Catalan ships were attacking Genoese grain ships trading along the coastlines of the principality of Piombino, acts for which Emmanuel d'Appiano felt it important to send apologies to Francesco Sforza¹⁶.

Trouble in these waters became ever more acute after 1458, as Genoa became the base from which Jean de Calabre attempted to reconquer Naples on behalf of his father¹⁷. Genoese-Catalan warfare blighted the waters between Italy and Spain in this period, as a fascinating account of naval conflict between the Genoese and the Catalans in 1466, recently re-edited by Clara Fossati, makes plain¹⁸. Piracy, shipwrecks and other interruptions marred Genoese relations with Piombino in these years, and were reflected in the correspondence with Milan once Galeazzo Maria Sforza was lord of Genoa. In November 1468 a polite letter was sent to Jacopo II d'Appiano reporting rumours that that a galley of the Grimaldi had been wrecked at sea and that its captain and crew were now safe in Appiano hands. Although the letter diplomatically assumed that the men would be restored to Genoa, the underlying message seems to be: do not dare assume that you can hold on to

¹⁴ Abulafia, *From Tunis to Piombino*, p. 289-292.

¹⁵ MS 139, f. 67r-v.

¹⁶ ASM, PE 313, 12 August 1456.

¹⁷ D. Abulafia, *The inception of the reign of Ferrante I of Naples*, in D. Abulafia, ed., *The French descent into Renaissance Italy, 1494-95: antecedents and effects*, Aldershot 1995, p. 71-89.

¹⁸ A. Gallo, *Commentarius de Genuensium maritima classe in Barchinonenses expedita, anno MCCCCLXVI*, ed. C. Fossati, Roma 2010 (Rerum italicarum scriptores, ser. 3, 8), <<http://copac.ac.uk/search?ti=Commentarius%20de%20Genuensium%20maritima%20classe%20in%20Barchinonenses%20expedita,%20anno%20MCCCCLXVI>>; and C. Fossati, *Genovesi e Catalani: guerra sul mare. Relazione di Antonio Gallo (1466)*, Genova 2008, both containing the Latin text and an Italian translation.

them or their goods¹⁹. This theme was taken up in a subsequent letter of early December, where the point was made that the «cose tolti [sic] ali subditi nostri siano interamente restitute»²⁰. According to a letter of 1471, the men of Piombino had expropriated all the goods on board, «allegando hauere posuto secondo lantiqua consuetudine de vostri predecessori retenere dicte robbe», as the Sforza court complained on Genoa's behalf; the fact was (Milan insisted) that the Genoese had always treated the Piombinesi well, with *umanità* and *cortesìa*, so this behaviour was simply not acceptable²¹. Milanese diplomacy involved the exercise of considerable charm: Jacopo III was reminded of the good relations between his father Emanuele and Francesco Sforza, and of the warm ties between Milan and his protector King Ferrante, so that Jacopo's co-operation with Milan «farà cosa grata ala S.ta M.ta del Re», a point not lost on Jacopo when he eventually replied in spring, 1469, full of respect for both the duke and the king but not apparently offering a solution to the disagreement²². Inevitably, the matter dragged on, and Galeazzo Maria Sforza was still complaining more than a year and a half later, after receiving representations from the governor of Genoa; but Jacopo was still failing to promise anything of substance, though he did offer sweet words: «quanto questo mi doglia, nol porria narrare»²³. The final outcome is not recorded.

These events, hardly unusual in themselves at a time when pirates, Christian and Muslim, bedevilled the Tyrrhenian Sea, drew Piombino to Galeazzo Maria's attention. Jacopo III d'Appiano's close relationship with Naples did not dissuade the duke of Milan from intervention in Piombino; maybe it was irritation over matters such as the shipwreck that encouraged him, during a visit to Florence in 1471, to give his personal support to exiled Piombinesi who invited him to seize Piombino and Elba²⁴. Since the Sieneese had already warned the Piombinesi of the arrival of an enemy army, the town was prepared for the onslaught and the rag-tag enemy army achieved nothing. The Florentines appear to have been content to stand aside and to let the invaders have their way, and Milan at most offered useless words of encouragement. But Jacopo decided he could not simply rely on his own resources²⁵. He complained about the way he had been treated to the Florentines and to the Neapolitans, who had become his protectors a few years earlier; and he requested Ferrante of Naples to send him troops, though for Cesaretti this involved nothing less than foreign occupation of the town: «sottoponendosi

¹⁹ ASM, PE 313, 21 November 1468.

²⁰ ASM, PE 313, 7 December 1468.

²¹ ASM, PE 313, 21 January 1471.

²² ASM, PE 313, 16 March 1469, 3 April 1470.

²³ ASM, PE 313, 1 December 1471 (also ASM, PE 313, 21 January 1471).

²⁴ Cesaretti, *Istoria*, vol. 2, p. 54-55, expanding (perhaps fancifully) on MS 139; I have not found any reference to this in the Piombino-Milan correspondence preserved in ASM, PE 313, which is perhaps not surprising.

²⁵ MS 139, f. 80r-v.

così per la prima volta ad un giogo straniero»²⁶. There may have been some resentment that the citizens of Piombino were obliged to supply bedding for these troops once they arrived²⁷. But the reasoning was explained by the author of the manuscript history of Piombino:

Poiché passando continue solleuazioni di Guerra tra i Potentati d'Italia, e non potendo questo Stato all'occorrenza senza qualche appoggio sostener gran tempo l'impeto d'inimico a lui Superiore, si pensò in Piombino con la legge o protezione di un tanto Rè non solo di godere una Pace più Sicura, e tranquilla, mà ancora di render vani quei pensieri, che auessero preteso di perturbargliela; per questo, e simili dimostrazioni d'affetto, che auuano praticato gl'Anziani in appagare anche in graue Scapito del Commune²⁸.

In return for its support the *signore* paid off debts that had been accrued by the commune; indeed, co-operation rather than confrontation generally characterised the relationship between the Appiani and the towns within their dominion. The intervention of the king of Naples in the internal affairs of Piombino was very limited; at one point Ferrante raised the question of the ownership of two castles claimed by the bishop of Massa, but to no effect²⁹. When Jacopo III died in 1474 the *signoria* passed smoothly to his eldest son, another Jacopo, who was urged in his father's will to respect the ties binding the Appiano dominion to King Ferrante of Naples. These ties were reaffirmed when Jacopo IV married Ferrante's grand-daughter Vittoria in 1476; they were further strengthened when Jacopo took charge of troops in the army of Alfonso, duke of Calabria, in the aftermath of the Pazzi conspiracy, while Naples and Pope Sixtus IV were at war with Medicean Florence³⁰. Indeed, so ardent was the lord of Piombino that he pursued Costanza Sforza of Pesaro off the battlefield at Poggio Imperiale, where the Neapolitans secured a significant victory in September 1478; away from the protection of his own men, he was seized by her troops and conveyed to captivity in Poggibonsi. This did not last long, since there were *signori* from the other side who had been captured, and Malavolti reports that an exchange was made with the lords of Carpi and Mirandola³¹. In any case, it is abundantly plain that Piombino had been drawn into the Neapolitan system of alliances, alongside such minor lords as the counts of Urbino. And, given the importance that the Aragonese in Naples attached to building their power and influence in Etruria – in the area between Siena and Rome – Piombino promised to have its strategic uses not simply as a protector of the sea lanes, but also as an advance position on land. Yet it would be a mistake to exaggerate Jacopo's dependence on Ferrante of Naples. He also took employment as captain of the Sienese

²⁶ Cesaretti, *Istoria*, vol. 2, p. 56.

²⁷ Cappelletti, *Storia di Piombino*, p. 110-111.

²⁸ MS 139, ff. 80v-81r.

²⁹ Cappelletti, *Storia di Piombino*, doc. IV, p. 461, for Valle and Montione.

³⁰ ASM, PE 313, 1 February 1476; Cappelletti, *Storia di Piombino*, p. 114-117.

³¹ Orlando Malavolti, *Historia de' fatti, e guerre de' Sanesi*, Venezia 1599, pt. 3, f. 74v.

armies in 1489. Like many minor *signori*, he saw in the *condotte* offered by other Italian polities a chance to gain renown and money.

The rulers of Piombino were pre-occupied by the ambitions of other Italian powers far greater than themselves, and their foreign enterprises were mainly concerned with fostering trade overseas. But there was one exception, and this once again brought them into a region in which Milan had until recently played a role. Since Piombino and Elba stood astride the sea passage dividing Corsica from the Italian mainland, it is not surprising that they received appeals from Corsican rebels discontented with the government of the island by the Banco di San Giorgio in Genoa, which had itself been succeeded between 1464 and 1478 by the overlordship of the Sforza dukes of Milan (in their capacity as lords of Genoa); in 1478 the island had been handed over by the Milanese to the Genoese nobleman Tommaso di Campofregoso, but he only exercised his own claims to lordship for five years. Corsica was thus in a ferment by 1483, and an attempt by another Italian prince, such as the Appiano lord of Piombino, to gain lands in Corsica was not entirely preposterous: the island seemed open to the first comer. But the difficulty was that even in the north of the island, where the Appiani concentrated their efforts, there were deep divisions within the Corsican elite, and the Appiani merely represented one faction among many in a society riven by feud and faction.

In response to an appeal for help from the rebel leader Rinuccio de Leca, Jacopo IV d'Appiano sent his brother Gherardo, count of Montagnano, with troops to Corsica in 1483. He concentrated his efforts on the fertile plain of the Balagne in the north-west of the island, and made some progress in Cap Corse as well, besieging Bastia. Ninci, writing for his Corsican master, the lord of Elba and ex-emperor of France, recounts how Gherardo was acclaimed as count of Corsica by Rinuccio da Leca, who also took an oath of fealty to Jacopo IV³². Rinuccio was vigorously opposed by a cousin, Gianpaolo de Leca, who not surprisingly called on the island's old master, Genoa, for help. Genoa had limited commercial interests in Corsica, even after many decades of Genoese rule there; its main export from Corsica was wine, and its main port of embarkation was Saint-Florent, close to Cap Corse. But Genoese commercial shipping also made very intensive use of the passage between Elba and Corsica, and it was essential to ensure the stability of those waters. Thus the Genoese soon riposted with a landing at Saint-Florent; and Gherardo was scared away from the island. Cappelletti notes that, eighteen years later, a member of one of the families that opposed Gherardo d'Appiano was well received in Piombino by Jacopo IV, founding a local family which was appositely named the Balagna³³. It is thus clear that the dramatic evidence for an invasion of Corsica in 1483 represents only the tip of an iceberg.

³² Ninci, *Storia dell'isola*, p. 63-64; Cappelletti, *Storia*, p. 117; P. Antonetti, *Histoire de la Corse*, Paris 1990², p. 183.

³³ Cesaretti, *Istoria*, vol. 2, p. 73-74; Cappelletti, *Storia*, p. 118.

There were close links between the rather wild island and Tuscany by way of Elba and Piombino. It is likely that commercial ties were intimate, even though Corsica offered little apart from primary goods such as wine and oil³⁴. A number of Corsicans were brought to Appiano territory to repopulate the empty town of Populonia up the coast from Piombino³⁵.

More alarming for the Appiani were events on another island, Elba; they also reveal that the sea channel between Corsica and Elba was of crucial strategic and commercial importance. In 1489 a Catalan pirate, Francesc Torella (Francesco Turriglia, known as Fra Carlo the Pirate), arrived with a sizeable fleet, supposedly planning the invasion of Elba. With the island under effective siege, and local shortages of essential goods, Jacopo was urged to flush the pirates out of Piombinese waters; but the problem was a lack of resources. Indeed, he very much feared that the inhabitants of Elba would pack their bags and leave, exposing the island even more to such predators. Fortunately for Jacopo the king of Aragon, Ferdinand the Catholic, was aware of the crisis and was keen to intervene; Bernat de Vilamari, the commander of the Catalan-Aragonese fleet, arrived promptly off Piombino, and a letter from the Aragonese king assured the Appiani that he would not permit any of his subjects to commit aggressive acts against the *signore* and his subjects. Fine gifts from the Appiani ensured that help was duly given against Torella, whose squadron scampered away on the arrival of the official Aragonese fleet, and who left behind the goods and prisoners he had taken on Elba³⁶. We can detect several motives on the part of the king of Aragon. One was certainly to clear the waters of the Tyrrhenian Sea of pirates, because their presence was damaging to commerce and the king was anxious to kick-start the Catalan economy again after the damaging interlude of the Catalan civil war. A second motive was surely to express his own political claims in the area, against the day when he could assert his authority over the kingdom of Naples and those parts of Italy which depended in some way on Naples. In the longer term, this policy culminated in the complete takeover of Naples in 1503, and the involvement of Ferdinand in the complex politics of the Italian peninsula, but at this stage he was probably thinking of a looser relationship with his Neapolitan cousins. Catalan-Aragonese hegemony already extended over the islands of Sicily and Sardinia, though Alfonso V's attempts to secure Corsica had ended in defeat. But the events of 1489 can be seen as the first stage in the creation of a new political relationship binding the Appiani to the main line of the house of Aragon-Catalonia.

A third incident in the same waters in 1491-1492 indicated that Ferdinand's promises of protection were still unable to secure the tranquillity that the Appiani sought. An embassy had to be sent to Milan to complain

³⁴ R. Emmanuelli, *L'implantation génoise*, in *Histoire de la Corse*, ed. P. Arrighi and A. Olivesi, Toulouse 1990, p. 202.

³⁵ Petroni, *Cronistoria*, p. 94-95, for Corsican migration towards Piombino around 1490.

³⁶ MS 139, f. 88r-v.

at the activities of pirates who were deemed to be vassals of the Sforza duke, Nicolino and Batino. The duke was to be told how:

infestassero i mari [*text: mori*] di Piombino commettendo mille insolenze, ed ostilità contro i sudditi del signore Jacopo, e che si volesse dignare di proibire a detti Pirati il corso del canale di Piombino, e di far restituire tutto quello, che auessero tolto in questo dominio, ò almeno permettesse, mentre dissimulasse il rimedio, che i Piombinesi senza chiamarsene offesi, auessero armati legni per rimouer l'orgoglio di quei ladroni³⁷.

The author of the *Memorie* could not, however, discover what had happened to the embassy³⁸. The file of correspondence between Piombino and Milan in the *Potenze Estere* section of the State Archives in Milan is very meagre at this point, but a letter dated 3 August 1491 [1492 Pisan-style], sent by Jacopo IV d'Appiano to the duke of Milan, confirms that the complaint was real: it speaks of «quelli che portano la insignia sua» and of the activities of a Genoese captain, Butino Giustiniani, whose galleys had seized the property of Jacopo's vassals³⁹. Ninci, the historian of Elba, was, nonetheless, certain that he knew the outcome: the Milanese government was angry that the pirates, whether or not supplied with Milanese letters patent, had been attacking the ships of a friendly state while flying the flag of Milan: «varj na-vigli armati con paviglione milanese; i quali, dopo aver arrestati non pochi bastimenti dell'isola, bloccaron questa strettamente». However, «gl'Elbani e lui si erano astenuti dall'armar contro i medesimi pel rispetto della bandiera amica che facevano sventolare al loro bordo», while Ludovico il Moro was anxious to do whatever he could to «conservarsi l'occupato dominio»⁴⁰. In other words, the problem was not so much that Nicolino and Batino were flying the Milanese flag on their ships, as that they were attacking Piombinese vessels when they were expected to concentrate their attention elsewhere. It is worth asking whether the Milanese, or rather Genoese, pirates identified Piombino, at this stage, with other powers, notably Naples, since the relations between Milan and Naples had undergone a sharp decline since the 1460's. They may well have seen Piombino as fair game because of its intimate ties to the Aragonese king of Naples. Clearly, though, the efforts of Piombino, Aragon, Milan and Genoa were not sufficient to make the channel between Piombino and Corsica, and the waters around Elba, entirely safe; nor was the ability of the Piombinesi to keep their waters clear made easier by the rocky shoreline of Elba itself, which provided endless opportunities for pirates to hide.

Remote from their main protector, the Aragonese king of Naples, the rulers of Piombino had to use their own talents to protect themselves from interference by very much greater powers. Milan, especially when it was overlord of Genoa, entered their calculations, and the compact body of corre-

³⁷ MS 139, f. 89v.

³⁸ MS 139, f. 90r.

³⁹ ASM, PE 313, 3 August 1492.

⁴⁰ Ninci, *Storia dell'isola*, p. 65.

spondence between the Appiani and the Sforzas conveys a sense of the cautious respect which the lords of Piombino displayed when they addressed the dukes of Milan. On the great chess-board of late Quattrocento politics, as on any chess-board, pawns cannot be ignored, even when they stand at some remove from their king and queen. This is an instance in which a pawn occupied a significant strategic position and could even hope for aid from other more powerful pieces on the board.