INTRODUCTION: THE
WHEEL OF FORTUNE

> Every day these exiles seem to me to be in worse condition – they flock together like starlings, and they are discontented, and they have spread many rumours, as those who have been turned out do, which are not very pleasing to your friends.[1]

Much of the experience of political exiles in Renaissance Italy is encapsulated in this quotation from a report by a Sienese ambassador in Rome in March 1485 – their clustering together with other exiles from their home to seek support, and comfort; their financial difficulties and their periods of discouragement; their efforts to undermine the regime back home that had driven them away; the close surveillance by the agents and friends of their political enemies, a token of the threat they were considered to be; and the hostility and disparagement with which those enemies spoke of them and treated them. Another common aspect of the experience of exiles is also exemplified by this report of the ambassador, Guidantonio Buoninsegni. Only a few years before he had himself been in exile in Rome, and the year after he spoke so scornfully of the opponents of the regime in Siena he fell foul of it himself, and was once again in Rome as an exile. Many an exile did return, sometimes to be reconciled to his opponents, sometimes to take his revenge on them. Many a member of the political elites of Italy knew what it was like to be bound to fortune's wheel.

Not all the political exiles of Renaissance Italy behaved like these discontented Sienese, intriguing in Rome in 1485. Some lived peacefully where they had been sent, trying to win the favour of the government back home, or building a new life for themselves elsewhere. Some were exiled princes, treated with honour, entertained at courts. The exile as solitary, disconsolate wanderer, pining for home, family and friends – one of the most universal of all literary topoi from ancient Rome to

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[1] ASS, Concistoro 2457, 90: Guidantonio Buoninsegni, 21 Mar. 1484(5), Rome.

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modern Latin America, from the poetry of the Vikings to the writings of Dante – is perhaps the figure least frequently found in reality in Renaissance Italy. There the proverbial exiles of everyday political life were the 'starlings', banding together, doing all they could to return.

These starlings could be much more than a noisy nuisance: they could be a cause of disorder and political turmoil, not just in their place of origin but far beyond. Often they could turn to powerful friends in other states, or to factional allies, or simply to the enemies of their enemies, and find encouragement, diplomatic help, money, perhaps troops. Few conflicts between Italian states could not provide an opening for some group of exiles or other to pursue their own goals. Employing the exiles of a rival state to annoy or threaten its government was a common ploy in the diplomacy and warfare of Renaissance Italy, even in the period between the Peace of Lodi of 1454 and the beginning of the Italian Wars in 1494. Focusing this study of exiles on the second half of the fifteenth century provides an opportunity to see how they fared at times when there was general peace in Italy as well as during times of conflict, and to assess the impact of the disruption of the political system of Italy brought about by the French, with the conquest of Naples by Charles VIII in 1494, and of Milan by Louis XII in 1499–1500.

It is the practical realities of political exile, and the practical consequences for the states of Renaissance Italy of the ferment produced by political exiles, with which this book is concerned, not exile as a literary topos or a state of mind. The first chapter is intended to serve as both an examination of the circumstances that gave rise to political exile, and an introduction to the more important individuals and groups of exiles that figure in later chapters. In the rest of the book, the experiences of exiles from one state, Siena, are highlighted and compared with those of exiles from elsewhere in Italy. How were sentences determined, and by whom? What other penalties might be imposed on exiles? Where were they sent, and where did they actually go? How did they support themselves? What happened to their families? How far did governments try to track and control their exiles, and how successfully did they do this when they tried? What did exiles who did not reconcile themselves to their fate try to do about it? Where did they turn for help and with what success? In what circumstances did exiles return home?

At least partial answers to all of these questions can be found in the Sienese archives. Siena was chosen for particular scrutiny in this study not only because of the sheer numbers of Sienese exiles – running into thousands – during this period, and their significance in Sienese political life, but also because of the abundance of information on the exiles to

be found in the surviving records. Enough information has been found on 610 Sienese exiled for political reasons between 1456 and 1500, some of them exiled more than once and thus providing a total of 691 cases of exile, to make possible some statistical analysis. Until similar studies have been done on the exiles of other states, it is not possible to be sure how far the experiences of Sienese exiles were representative of other Italian political exiles. But there is enough information available in print, notably for Florence but for other states as well, to allow some comparisons to be made. It is regrettable that more information is not available on those exiled by princes who were not members of the prince's own families, so that it would be possible to make more systematic comparisons of the exiles from republics with those from principalities.

This is the first time such a comparative study has been made of political exiles in fifteenth-century Italy. Randolph Starn's *Contrary Commonwealth: The Theme of Exile in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (1982) is principally concerned with the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries; the section on Renaissance Italy is largely concerned with Florentine exiles in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. For Starn, exiles in fifteenth-century Italy were not only less numerous than in the thirteenth, but were so closely supervised by the stronger and better organized Renaissance states that they were more inclined to accept their fate with resignation than to resist:

> There were still outlaws, bandits, and *fuorusciti* of course. But with the parceling out of Italy among something like territorial states the land-based and urban strategies of exiles during an earlier age could be more closely controlled. Internal consolidation extending watchful institutions and intensifying pressures for ideological conformity within each political unit left still less room for the brash maneuvers and clear consciences of exiles in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.[2]

Jacques Heers in his *L'exil, la vie politique et la société* (French edition first published in 1995) also deals with the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, and also concentrates on the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. The examples he draws on for the later fourteenth and fifteenth centuries come largely from Florence and Genoa. To a greater extent than Starn's, Heers's treatment of the subject of political exile touches on themes that are discussed here, but not in a way that facilitates comparisons between the later fifteenth century and the earlier periods. Heers treats the period as a whole, and does not consider how changes in the political life and the political structures of Italy from the early

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[2] Randolph Starn, *Contrary Commonwealth: The Theme of Exile in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley, 1982), p. 87.

fourteenth to the later fifteenth century shaped the incidence and ex-
perience of political exile.

But political exile in the second half of the fifteenth century was a
more widespread and more significant phenomenon than Starn argues
or Heers implies. Most regimes, princely or republican, had opponents
in exile. Many of the principal actors in Italian politics had at least one
episode of exile in their career. All regimes were prepared to manipulate
the exiles of others for their own advantage, if the opportunity arose.
The political life of Renaissance Italy cannot be properly understood
unless the practice and experience of exile is appreciated as one of its de-
fining characteristics.

CHAPTER I

INTO EXILE

Italy was not the only region of Western Europe in which there were political exiles in the later fifteenth century. When Henry VI fled to Scotland after the defeat of his supporters at the battle of Towton in March 1461, he was not unusual among the English kings of the fifteenth century in having personal experience of exile. 'His grandfather [Henry IV] had won the kingdom from exile; Henry's successor [Edward IV] was to recover it from exile. Starting out from exile . . . his nephew, Henry Tudor, was likewise to secure a kingdom for himself in 1485.'[1] The future Louis XI of France took refuge at the court of the Duke of Burgundy in 1456, and he did not return to France until he came to take possession of the French throne in 1461 after his father's death. But if the highest in the land knew exile in England and France, as some members of Italian ruling families did, there do not seem to have been the equivalents there of the exiles from civic strife that were so common in Italy. Towns in England, France and Spain, even the great cities of the Low Countries, did not have the degree or type of political independence that gave rise to the kind of contest for power that resulted in the exile of political opponents. The Imperial cities of the Holy Roman Empire had greater autonomy and powers of self-government. Although only a few had their own territories, like the *contado* so jealously guarded by Italian towns and cities, some could appear familiar political entities to Italian travellers. The city of Ulm, for instance, was described by one traveller from Italy as 'a big town, governed as a free republic, rich and full of merchants'.[2] Civic strife and contests for power in such cities could result in the exile of the vanquished. One such exile was the pioneer printer Johann Gutenberg,

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[1] Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (London, 1983), p. 333.
[2] F. R. H. Du Boulay, *Germany in the Later Middle Ages* (London, 1983), p. 118.

who was banished twice, for long periods, from his native city of Mainz.

Nevertheless, nowhere else in Western Europe could rival Italy for the sheer numbers of political exiles. In Italy, it was not just men wielding power in large, rich cities governing extensive territories, independent republics such as Florence or Venice, who considered that they had the right to exile their political rivals. Men in towns subject to such cities, or to a prince, men in backwoods communities that had little to fight over but the meagre fruits of office or the exploitation of communal property, might also consider that they had the legal power to expel their rivals. The fragmentation of political authority in medi-aeval Italy had meant that many towns, not just the great merchant cities, had come to see themselves as autonomous political entities, and the patterns of thought and behaviour that had developed in the turbu-lence of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries persisted, even when such towns had fallen under the domination of a larger neighbour or of a prince. The tradition that those who held power in a commune had the right to exclude and expel their rivals was widespread and firmly rooted (even if it might be contested, in the case of subject towns, by their superiors). If political differences appeared irreconcilable, not amenable to compromise, the exile of those worsted in the contest was the usual way of removing them from the scene. Long-term imprisonment was rare in Renaissance Italy. Locking up large numbers of political oppo-nents for lengthy periods was not an option, though small groups might be incarcerated by a confident regime with secure prisons at its disposal. Political executions of those found guilty of political crimes were in-frequent too, and regarded as shocking, unless it was for an act such as an assassination attempt. Political executions for which there was less obvious justification were regarded as vindictive, and harmed the repu-tation of a regime at home and abroad. Exiling political opponents might be regarded as injudicious, or even in some cases unjust, but would not attract anything like the same adverse comment.

There were exiles from independent republics and from subject towns, from the kingdom of Naples and from other *signorie*, large and small. There were disgraced courtiers, members of ruling families, the leaders and the foot-soldiers of urban factions, sober professional men who had been defeated in political disputes, men who had contravened the rules governing elections to political office in their city, men who had tried to assassinate their rivals. Within this varied multitude, four broad categories of exiles can be distinguished. The first comprised the members of ruling or at least dominant families, who were the losers in dynastic quarrels. Some were expelled by their rivals, some by other

powers – intervention by Italian states in the dynastic disputes of their neighbours was a frequent occurrence, and required little excuse other than self-interest. Opponents of such dynasties, who rebelled against them or challenged their rule, formed the second category; those who contested the policies or structure of republican government the third. The fourth, the most numerous, was those who had been defeated in struggles between political factions. Not all exiles fall neatly into one or other of these categories, as we shall see, but they do provide some help in understanding the circumstances in which so many fifteenth-century Italians were forced into political exile.

Exiles who fell into the first category included some of the most prominent individuals who found themselves in that predicament in fifteenth-century Italy. A future Duke of Milan, more than one King of Naples, several past or future Doges of Genoa, members of several signorial families, all spent some time in exile. The uncertain legitimacy of the position of many ruling families, the lack of fixed rules of succession, a disposition to regard states as a kind of family property which could be divided up among family members, all contributed to the stock of banished aspiring or deposed *signori*, of various degrees of power and rank. The French invasions of Italy in 1494 and 1499–1500 were the cause, direct or indirect, of the exile of many more.

The reluctance by younger brothers to accept the right of the eldest to be sole ruler of the state was the root of the disputes that wracked the Sforza dynasty in Milan in the late 1470s and early 1480s, and led to the exile of several of its members. Galeazzo Maria, the eldest legitimate son, who succeeded his father Francesco as duke in 1466, relished his role as prince of one of the most powerful states of Italy. Two of his brothers, Sforza Maria and Lodovico, may have conspired to kill him. In November 1476, a few months after this plot was supposed to have been hatched, they were sent to France. Galeazzo Maria claimed that they were going of their own accord, because they wanted to 'see the world', but it was clear that they were, in effect, going into exile.[3]

Within days of their arrival at the French court, on 26 December 1476, Galeazzo Maria was assassinated by a group of young Milanese patricians. Sforza Maria and Lodovico immediately returned to Milan. There Galeazzo Maria's widow Bona had assumed the regency for her young son Giangaleazzo Maria, and she was supported by Cicco Simonetta, the powerful ducal secretary. Even before the Sforza brothers returned from France, a conspiracy was brewing in Milan to make

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[3] A. Dina, 'Lodovico il Moro prima della sua venuta al governo', *ASL* 13 (1886), 764, 766; Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lettere*, vol. II, p. 534.

Sforza Maria head of the government, if not duke; but the arrest of one of the leading conspirators, Ettore da Vimercate, put an end to that design. The Sforza brothers claimed that Francesco had never intended that Galeazzo Maria should rule alone, but that they all should have had a share in the government. They came to terms with Bona, promising to live in Milan, although she really wanted them to leave and tried to arrange this by asking Milan's allies to give them *condotte*.[4]

It was Cicco Simonetta who brought matters to a head by ordering the arrest of a veteran *condottiere* of the Sforza, Donato del Conte, who was alleged to know all about the conspiracy against him and the duchess. The brothers Sforza Maria, Lodovico, Ottaviano and Ascanio, together with their cousin Roberto da Sanseverino, mustered what forces they could and tried to arouse the people, but met with little response. Sforza Maria, Lodovico and Ascanio submitted, while Ottaviano, the youngest brother, panicked and fled, drowning as he tried to ford the River Adda. Roberto, whom Bona treated as the main conspirator, a disloyal ingrate who had suborned her brothers-in-law, also fled. He was condemned as a rebel; the three surviving Sforza brothers who had taken part in the rising were ordered into exile. They returned home in 1479: a combination of Roberto da Sanseverino's military skills and support for the brothers in Milan and elsewhere in the duchy brought about the submission of several towns to them, and induced Bona to negotiate. Sforza Maria had died suddenly during the campaign, but Lodovico and Roberto were back in Milan in September 1479, and Ascanio joined them the following month.[5]

Three days after Lodovico came back, Cicco Simonetta was arrested; he was executed a year later. The power struggle at the Milanese court is difficult to decipher, but Lodovico was the undoubted victor. Ascanio, who also aspired to a role in the government, was sent into exile again in early March 1480, accused of intriguing with the leaders of the Ghibellines in Milan and with the Neapolitan ambassador. In October, Lodovico was involved in manoeuvres that separated the young duke from his mother, and forced her to agree to the immediate exile of her favourite, Antonio Tassini, and his father from the duchy

[4] Ibid., pp. 523–35; Riccardo Fubini, 'Osservazioni e documenti sulla crisi del Ducato di Milano nel 1477' in Sergio Bertelli and Gloria Ramakus (eds.), *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, 2 vols. (Florence, 1978), vol. I, pp. 47–103; Carlo de' Rosmini, *Dell' istoria di Milano*, 4 vols. (Milan, 1820), vol. IV, pp. 158–62.

[5] Carlo de' Rosmini, *Dell'istoria intorno alle militari imprese e alla vita di Gian-Jacopo Trivulzio detto il Magno*, 2 vols. (Milan, 1885), vol. I, pp. 61–77, vol. II, pp. 16–19, 20–4, 41–62; Rosmini, *Dell' istoria di Milano*, vol. IV, pp. 163–5; Bernardino Corio, *Storia di Milano*, 3 vols. (Milan, 1857, 1975), vol. III, pp. 319–22; Franco Catalano, *Lodovico il Moro* (Milan, 1985), pp. 26–8; Caterina Santoro, *Gli Sforza* (n.p., 1968), pp. 206–14.

for ten years. The departure of Tassini and the loss of custody of her son left Bona desperate. She declared her intention of leaving Milan: she had thought of returning to her family in Savoy, but she was compelled to go to the castle of Abbiategrasso and to stay there.[6]

Lodovico was now the dominant member of the government in Milan, but he was still not the undisputed master. Roberto da Sanse-verino, for one, was an influential figure, but he became increasingly estranged from Lodovico. He felt slighted and sidelined, but the last straw seems to have been when his pay as a *condottiere* began to fall into arrears. In October 1481 he left Milan for his castle at Castelnuovo. In January 1482 he was given an ultimatum: either he came to Milan within two days, or he must leave the duchy. When he did not come, troops were sent against him, and in early February he escaped into exile.[7] Ascanio Sforza came back to Milan in September 1482. He was given an honourable role in the government, but one clearly subordinate to that of Lodovico. The diplomatic pressure Lodovico brought to bear on the pope, which finally procured a cardinal's hat for Ascanio in March 1484, had a dual motive. It secured a position of honour and influence for his brother, and it provided a good reason to send him away from Milan.[8]

The d'Este of Ferrara had been established as a ruling family for much longer than the Sforza, but no rules of succession had become fixed. Niccolò d'Este, just before his death in 1441, ordered that he should be succeeded by his natural sons Lionello and Borso, with his much younger legitimate son, Ercole, being placed only third in line. On Lionello's death in 1450, he was duly succeeded by Borso, but Lionello's young son Niccolò grew up believing that he, not Ercole, should be Borso's heir. As Borso lay gravely ill in the summer of 1471, Ercole and Niccolò squared up to dispute the succession. Ercole had the support of Venice, Niccolò of his mother's family, the Gonzaga of Mantua. When Borso died, Ercole waited until Venetian ships had reached Ferrara along the Po before proclaiming the death of the duke and his own succession. Niccolò and his Gonzaga relatives could do nothing, and he

[6] Santoro, *Gli Sforza*, pp. 216–26; Rosmini, *Gian-Jacopo Trivulzio*, vol. I, pp. 78–90, vol. II, pp. 62–75; Rosmini, *Dell' istoria di Milano*, vol. IV, pp. 178–221; Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lettere*, vol. V, pp. 41–2, 93; Marco Pellegrini, 'Ascanio Maria Sforza: la creazione di un cardinale "di famiglia"' in Giorgio Chittolini (ed.), *Gli Sforza, la Chiesa lombarda, la corte di Roma. Strutture e pratiche beneficiarie nel ducato di Milano (1450–1535)* (Naples, 1989), pp. 258–62; Zelmira Arici, *Bona di Savoia, Duchessa di Milano (1449–1503)* (Turin, 1935), pp. 146–63.
[7] Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lettere*, vol. VI, pp. 64–5, 101, 153–4, 172, 194–5, 209, 229–30, 258, 269.
[8] Pellegrini, 'Ascanio Maria Sforza', pp. 262–8.

had to stay in exile in Mantua, where he had been sent by Borso. He tried to depose Ercole in September 1476 but found little support in the city, and was captured and executed. Another member of his family to cause Ercole concern was his half-brother Alfonso. Alfonso had supported Ercole when he took power in 1471, and his only offence may have been his personal popularity in Ferrara. Nevertheless, Ercole sent him into exile in 1474, and despite further proofs of his loyalty, Alberto was kept away from Ferrara for a decade.[9]

In the case of two old-established families of Romagnol *signori*, the Ordelaffi and Manfredi, family quarrels and succession disputes not only led to exile for some members of the families, but also provided openings for an ambitious papal *nipote*, Girolamo Riario, to take over their states.

It was another will stipulating the succession of one brother to another that was at the root of the dispute among the Manfredi of Faenza in the 1470s. By the terms of their father's will, Galeotto Manfredi was to succeed his brother Carlo as *signore* of Faenza, but they quarrelled and Galeotto and another brother, Lanzalotto, were sent away from Faenza in 1476. By late 1477 Carlo was very ill, and on 2 October a fourth brother, Federico, who was Bishop of Faenza and had been acting as Carlo's lieutenant, made the Faentini swear fealty to Ottaviano, Carlo's young son, as his heir. A first attempt by Galeotto to return failed in October, but a second attempt on 16 November, the day after a popular uprising against grain speculation by Federico, was successful, and Galeotto was greeted rapturously by the Faentini. He also had troops from Girolamo Riario, Pino Ordelaffi of Forlì, Bologna and Venice to back him up. Carlo and Federico, who had retreated to the fortress in the city, sent to Naples for help. King Ferrante sent 40 squadrons to Fano, and tried to negotiate an agreement to keep Carlo in power. As Florence and Milan also decided to back Galeotto, Ferrante had to yield. When no help arrived from Ferrante, Carlo surrendered on 9 December, and left for Ferrara and then for Naples; Federico had already fled.[10]

Exploitation by Galeazzo Maria Sforza of a family dispute among another branch of the Manfredi resulted in their exile and the loss of

[9] Antonio Capelli, 'Niccolò di Leonello d'Este', *Atti e memorie delle RR. Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Province Modenesi e Parmensi* 5 (1870), 413–38; Thomas Tuohy, *Herculean Ferrara: Ercole d'Este, 1471–1505, and the Invention of a Ducal Capital* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 42.

[10] Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lettere*, vol. II, pp. 411–14, 438–43, 448–9; Anonimo Veronese, *Cronaca 1466–88*, ed. G. Soranzo (Venice, 1915), pp. 331–2; *Corpus Chronicorum Bononiensium*, ed. A. Sorbelli, RRIISS, 18, i (Città di Castello, 1906–Bologna, 1940) pp. 446–7; Andrea Bernardi, *Cronache forlivesi dal 1476 al 1517*, ed. Giuseppe Mazzatinti, 3 vols. (Bologna, 1895–7), vol. I, pp. 16–20.