

## **Lorenzo de Medici and the Peace of Renaissance Italy**

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Contemporary sources agree that Lorenzo de Medici, the 'first citizen' of the republic of Florence, was responsible to a large extent for the peace of all Italy, particularly from the late 1470s and throughout the 1480s. The historical record of events clearly supports this view. This period of tranquility was established through Lorenzo's successful diplomatic policies and his role in the politics of Renaissance Italy. His diplomatic achievements are shown at all stages throughout his career, particularly in his management of the aftermath of the Pazzi conspiracy, his diplomatic success in the war between Pope Sixtus IV and Naples, and his negotiations on behalf of Naples to Pope Innocent VIII. In all these events Lorenzo played an important peace keeping role in the wars between the other states of Italy, and in this way acted to keep peace throughout the peninsula.

All the contemporary sources of the period agree that it was indeed due to Lorenzo's political interventions and policies that Italy enjoyed such a period of peace and prosperity. The History of Italy, which was written in approximately 1538 by the Florentine historian Guicciardini, is a very significant source for the times. Guicciardini is quick to attribute the peace of Italy, at least in part, to Lorenzo:

"Italy had never enjoyed such prosperity, or known so favourable situation as that in which it found itself so securely at rest in the year of our Christian salvation, 1490 and the years immediately before and after. Many factors kept her in that state of felicity which was the consequence of various causes. But it is most commonly agreed that, among these no small praise should be attributed to the industry and skill of Lorenzo de Medici " (Guicciardini: p.4)

Niccolo Machiavelli, with an equally significant source in the History of Florence, and personal experience of Lorenzo's rule, is also certain of Lorenzo's contribution.

"the Florentines lived in prosperous tranquillity (sic) until the death of Lorenzo de Medici in 1492; for having established peace by his good judgement and authority, Lorenzo devoted his attention elsewhere" (Machiavelli: p.36)

It seems clear that Lorenzo's contemporaries believed him largely responsible for the peace.

Lorenzo's actions during the aftermath of the Pazzi Conspiracy of 1478 are perhaps the most significant of many instances, in which Lorenzo's diplomatic policies preserved peace in Italy. It remains unclear who initiated the plot to kill Lorenzo and his brother. There is, however, ample evidence to suggest that Pope Sixtus IV was deeply involved in it. It was commonly agreed at the time that Pope Sixtus had a personal grudge against Lorenzo, and indeed, Lorenzo himself seems to have been of that opinion. "believing that as I am the person against whom the activities [of the pope] are directed" (Hibbert p.153)

Pope Sixtus was angered by Lorenzo's enduring influence in Florence (over his own) and by the execution of Archbishop Salviati (who had been personally appointed as Archbishop for the region by Sixtus) for his role in the Pazzi conspiracy. Sixtus made an alliance with King Ferrante of Naples and waged war against Lorenzo. In 1479 Florence was in a very awkward and dangerous situation in the war when Lorenzo made an astonishing diplomatic move. He determined to visit the court of King Ferrante personally, at great risk to himself, to negotiate peace. In a humble letter written to the Signoria Lorenzo states his reasons and asks for consent to go on his dangerous mission:

"Action must be taken. I have decided, with your approval, to sail for Naples immediately. I may, perhaps, by delivering myself into their hands, be the means of restoring peace to our fellow citizens."  
(Hibbert: p.153)

Lorenzo's incredible action was a successful one. King Ferrante, a man noted for his 'hard and vindictive character' (Hibbert: p.154) was, after a visit of ten weeks, finally persuaded to end the war against Florence. Hibbert states that, according to accounts given by people at the court of King Ferrante, Lorenzo won his favour by talking about things of common interest, particularly classical Rome, and in his conversation skilfully alluding to how rulers of that time had achieved greatness through peace and not war.

That Lorenzo was responsible for the peace of Italy is again shown in his involvement in the war waged by Pope Sixtus IV and King Ferrante of Naples against Duke Ercole of Ferrara in 1481. Pope Sixtus' attempts to embroil Italy in petty conflicts (Hibbert: p.160) were again in play, and he had this time allied himself with the powerful Venetians. Florence and Milan were united in opposing Sixtus' expansion of land and power. The Pope's growing alarm that the Venetians may take Duke Ercole's lands for themselves, coupled with the continuing peace-keeping efforts by Lorenzo, finally induced him to form an alliance with Florence, Naples, Milan and Ferrara against Venice. This alliance was an important and well documented one.

The principal aim of the pact was to prevent the Venetians from becoming any more powerful since they were undoubtedly stronger than any of the allies alone, but much weaker than all of them together. (Guicciardini: p.8) During his lifetime Lorenzo did his utmost to maintain this alliance, a fact that is shown through the records of his constant diplomatic endeavours on behalf of the various states involved.

Lorenzo's enduring efforts for peace and his faith to the alliance is shown in his negotiations on behalf of King Ferrante of Naples to Pope Innocent VIII. Innocent succeeded to the papacy in August 1484 upon the death of Sixtus and Lorenzo lost no time in establishing his influence with the new Pope. Letters survive in which Lorenzo is most flattering. He endowed the Pope with great gifts. The alliance was further cemented in 1488 when Lorenzo's daughter Maddelana married Innocent's acknowledged son in a huge wedding. Lorenzo hence had a great influence over the Pope, and Guicciardini is clear that he used this to further his peace-keeping efforts.

Innocent VIII was thus induced to lend no little faith in his [Lorenzo's] advice.  
(Guicciardini: p.4)

Conflict arose when Innocent demanded payment of a papal tax which King Ferrante had no inclination to pay. The Pope's claims came about at the same time as an uprising amongst Naples' rebel feudal barons, and a war emerged in which he supported them and furthermore, threatened King Ferrante with a French conquest of Naples. Lorenzo however, had the foresight to see the danger that threatened Italy by getting the French involved. In a letter to his Roman ambassador in 1489 he wrote:

"I dislike these Ultramontanes and barbarians beginning to interfere with Italy. We are so disunited and deceitful that I believe that nothing but shame and loss will be our lot" (Trevelyan: p.185)

This time the device Lorenzo used to create peace was his considerable influence with the Pope. He managed to convince Innocent to create a settlement to which Ferrante agreed, though subsequently did not adhere to. Nevertheless, Lorenzo had established peace once again.

That Lorenzo de Medici was responsible to a large extent for the peace of Italy through the 1480s is undeniable. Lorenzo maintained this peace through his constant and skilful diplomatic efforts, and it is notable that the peace was reinstated after the three major conflicts during this period only by Lorenzo's intervention. The full extent of his achievement is shown by the collapse of peace after his death in 1492 and the shock of the French invasion. Such was the career of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

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