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# Negotiating Privileges at the Imperial Court: Emperor Sigismund's Charters for Italian Recipients and their Financial Dimension

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the financial dimension of the privileges issued to Italian recipients by the Holy Roman King and Emperor Sigismund. After outlining the general economic aspects of the imperial chancery production in the Late Middle Ages, the author draws on sources from the rich Italian archives to analyse the circumstances of Sigismund's important concessions for three prominent peninsular powers: the Margraviate of Mantua (1432), the Duchy of Milan (1426), and the Republic of Venice (1437). The main emphasis of the individual case studies is placed on the negotiations of fees and taxes for both the imperial chamber and chancery, the modalities of payment, and the strategies of creditors to recover their debts, or of debtors to avoid their obligations. This paper shows the granting of imperial privileges as a variable and flexible process, it highlights the importance of the chancellor's personal agency, and, more generally, the lack of institutionalisation as an inherent feature of pre-modern bureaucracy.

## Keywords

Emperor Sigismund – Holy Roman Empire – Imperial Court – Imperial Chancery – Privileges – Italy – Mantua – Milan – Venice – Late Middle Ages

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Understanding the “financial dimension” of the charters issued by the Holy Roman Kings and Emperors has crucial importance in the context of research into the economy of the imperial court and the administration of the Empire in the Late Middle Ages. The systematic treatment of the topic, however, is limited by the number of surviving sources. Accounts provide the ideal material, but these are scarce in the 14th–15th century imperial court. Even Henry VII's or Rupert of the Palatinate's income records do not list the revenues from the charters issued by the imperial chancery.<sup>1</sup> Of primary importance, therefore, are the account registers of Frederick III's chancery from 1471–1475, edited and analysed by Paul-Joachim Heinig.<sup>2</sup> A different approach was taken by Ivan Hlaváček in his research into the chancery production of King Wenceslas. In the absence of accounts, Hlaváček attempted to collect all the references to payments for privileges in the recipient archives and then formulated general conclusions based on them.<sup>3</sup>

The following pages will discuss the privileges of the Holy Roman King and later Emperor Sigismund (1411–1437) for Italian recipients.<sup>4</sup> In this case, there are no chancery regulations setting out the fees, nor other official court records of payments for charters issued (the accounts of the hereditary imperial chamberlain Konrad of Weinsberg apparently do not include this kind of income).<sup>5</sup> This lack of central financial records makes it necessary to follow Hlaváček's method outlined above and use the material stored in the recipient archives – mainly correspondence and other documents produced in connection with the activities of Italian ambassadors at the imperial court.<sup>6</sup> As it is not possible in this paper to systematically process and evaluate the financial framework of Sigismund's charters directed to the *Regnum Italiae* as a whole, after a general outline of the issue, the focus will be limited to three case studies.

For this analysis, important concessions for three prominent Italian powers, whose financial background can be reconstructed quite thoroughly, were deliberately chosen: the Margraviate of Mantua (1432), the Duchy of Milan (1426), and the Republic of Venice (1437).<sup>7</sup> This selection has both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the importance of these privileges has increased their resonance within the sources, but on the other, it distorts the resulting picture, since in terms of the circumstances in which the charters were issued, the amount of the fees and their enforcement, this certainly

1 For a commented survey of the preserved accounts kept at the imperial court until 1400, see MERSIOWSKY (2008), pp. 550–553.

2 HEINIG-GRUND (2001), vols. 1–2; cf. HEINIG (1997), vol. 2. However, it must be noted that Heinig focused on the political and social dimension of the concessions rather than the financial one. For economic aspects, see SEELIGER (1887).

3 HLAVÁČEK (1970), pp. 269–289.

4 For Sigismund, see the standard biographies by BAUM (1993); HOENSCH (1996), and the volume HRUZA-KAAR (2012).

5 KLUGE (2021), p. 414 and passim. For Konrad of Weinsberg and his accounts, further see FUHRMANN (2004), esp. pp. 11–35.

6 Such a similar approach, with the focus on the imperial cities in the first half of the 15th century, was also recently used by KLUGE (2021), pp. 414ff.

7 The fact that Venice did not belong to the Holy Roman Empire is not much important in this context; moreover, Sigismund's privilege created the Venetian doge *de jure* an imperial vicar.

does not constitute a representative sample of the ordinary concessions. This latter aspect in particular must therefore continue to be borne in mind. Subsequently, the context of each concession will be presented, followed by the negotiations of the fees and taxes, the modalities of the charters' release, the (non-)payment of debts and their recovery, and, finally, the relationship between the imperial chamber and the chancery will be discussed. A detailed analysis of these three specific and well-documented cases will thus show the importance of the "financial dimension" of the imperial charter production for both issuer and recipients, as well as the need for further research in this direction.

## Holy Roman Emperor, Imperial Chancery and (Italian) Recipients

First, it will be useful to briefly outline the general economic context of the imperial chancery production in the Late Middle Ages, taking into account Sigismund's reign.<sup>8</sup> Research on the functioning of this central institution in the era of the "Last Luxemburg" has so far focused almost exclusively on a prosopographical analysis of the personnel.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to start primarily from Hlaváček's analogous and still stimulating reflections on the "taxation and economic conditions of the chancery" under King Wenceslas (1376–1400), Sigismund's elder half-brother.<sup>10</sup> Another comparison is offered by the better investigated period of Frederick III (1440–1493).<sup>11</sup> Recently, a monograph on the finances of Holy Roman Kings and Emperors during the 15th century has been published by Mathias Kluge, thus also contributing to a better understanding of how the imperial court and chancery functioned.<sup>12</sup>

The late medieval imperial chancery issued somewhere between thousands and tens of thousands of documents.<sup>13</sup> A significant proportion of these – privileges, judicial verdicts, mandates, or other types of charters and letters – were issued in the recipient's interest, for which the sovereign and his chancery almost always collected the appropriate fees. These usually had two components: a fee, or rather compensation, paid to the imperial chamber for the monarch who was giving up part of his rights to the recipient, and

8 For a broader European perspective on this issue, see HEINIG (2003).

9 Cf. FORSTREITER [1924]; ERKENS (1987).

10 HLAVÁČEK (1970), pp. 269–289.

11 See, e.g. SEELIGER (1887), pp. 36–64; ISENMANN (1980a), pp. 45–61. This approach is justified both by the chronological proximity of Wenceslas's, Sigismund's, and Frederick III's reigns and by the partial continuity of the chancery personnel. Other classical works on the imperial chancery in the Late Middle Ages have not paid systematic attention to the financial dimension of its operation. Cf. LINDNER (1882); TADRA (1892); MORAW (1969); HEINIG (1985); HEINIG (1997), vol. 1, pp. 633–800. An exception is BRESSLAU (1889), vol. 1, pp. 410–418. For the situation in the 12th and 13th centuries, cf. BÜTTNER (2022), pp. 374–393.

12 KLUGE (2021), esp. pp. 413–442 and *passim*.

13 RI XI/1–2, records more than 12,000 items for Sigismund's reign. However, the editor Wilhelm Altmann relied mainly on the imperial registers, which record only part of the charters issued and do not include mandates and letters. The real number of Sigismund's charters issued must have been several times higher. E.g. for Frederick III's reign in the 1470s, it has been calculated that the number of imperial charters issued amounted to roughly seven or eight times those recorded in the registers. See HEINIG (1997), vol. 2, pp. 862–863.

a proper chancery tax for the chancellor and other personnel to cover their work and the cost of materials.<sup>14</sup> The three cases analysed in this paper will show the considerable variance in the modalities of the recipients' taxation and the distribution of the amount between the chamber and the chancery, as well as within the latter institution itself.

The amount of the fee demanded by the sovereign generally depended on the nature and importance of the concession according to the principle of direct proportionality: the more valuable the privilege, the greater the amount. It could range from a few florins to several hundreds, thousands, or, in extreme cases, even tens of thousands. The relationship between the issuer and the recipient, or the power-political configuration of the moment, also played an important role. If the concession was understood as a reward or compensation for proven or expected services by the recipient, who typically belonged to the court, the monarch could waive the fee. The same was true in the case of privileges issued in favour of princes, cities, or monasteries whose support or services the monarch needed – from his point of view, granting charters was a relatively cheap way of gaining allies within the Empire or of “paying” for hospitality provided to the imperial court.<sup>15</sup> It is generally considered that for the sovereign the financial proceeds from privileges “constituted one of the most important incomes after imperial taxes, royal regalia and the revenues from the domain”.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the context of Italy appears to be specific. As is well known, the Holy Roman King/Emperor also ruled over the territory of *Regnum Italiae*, which, despite its different development and autonomous status, formed part of the Empire.<sup>17</sup> Sigismund visited Italy in 1412–1414 and 1431–1433.<sup>18</sup> He therefore spent a slightly longer than average period of time there in the context of late medieval emperors, and this fact was reflected in the number of privileges granted to local polities and actors. Although the sovereign even issued charters in Italian affairs when he was away from the Apennine peninsula, which implied a trip by the supplicant or his representative to the imperial court, the number of charters issued increased significantly when he was actually present in Italy. Although a complete list of Sigismund's (extant) charters for Italian recipients, based on systematic research in the local archives, is still lacking, at least a rough guide can be drawn from the imperial registers, which record items in the high hundreds for Sigismund's entire reign.<sup>19</sup> In reality, however, the number must have been more in the

14 Hlaváček (1970), p. 271. However, Hlaváček also adds: “Aus praktischen Gründen ist jedoch zwischen beiden Summen schwer zu unterscheiden, da sie im untersuchten Quellenmaterial meist zusammenfließen” (ibid.).

15 Hlaváček (1970), pp. 272–276. Further see BRESSLAU (1889), vol. 1, pp. 414–416 (but without distinguishing between the sovereign's and chancery's share); ISENMANN (1980a), pp. 45–55; KLUGE (2021), pp. 414–442 (both with many examples from the first half of the 15th century).

16 Hlaváček (1970), pp. 276–277, with the quotation on p. 277. The structure and estimated amount of imperial revenues in the Late Middle Ages are given, e.g. by SCHUBERT (1979), pp. 171–189; ISENMANN (1980a), pp. 10–76.

17 For imperial Italy, see TRAUTZ (1963); LEE (2018); HUIJBERS (2022).

18 For Sigismund's Italian politics, see SCHIFF (1909); for his *Romzug*, see PROSKE (2018); KOVÁCS (2018); KOVÁCS (2021); KOVÁCS (2022).

19 RI XI/1–2. These data were systematically analysed by BEINHOF (1995), with tabular figures ibid., pp. 49–99.

low thousands. It can be assumed that most of the recipients had to pay a fee to the sovereign and a chancery tax for the privilege issued. It could even be argued that the money collected from the recipients of the charters, together with various gifts and subsidies, helped finance the Italian campaigns, as was the case in the time of Henry VII or Charles IV.<sup>20</sup>

The imperial chancery also came into its own. As with the fee for the monarch, the level of the chancery tax could fluctuate dramatically. During Sigismund's reign in particular, the "fiscalisation" of this institution, which was to levy ever higher taxes on the recipients, is often referred to amongst contemporary grievances.<sup>21</sup> This greater efficiency of the chancery, from the issuer's point of view, was undoubtedly related to the work of the scribe, notary, secretary, protonotary, vice-chancellor and, from 1433, the first lay chancellor as well as a "grey eminence" at the imperial court, Kaspar Schlick from Cheb († 1449).<sup>22</sup> This native of Bohemia maintained his prestigious position not only under Sigismund, but also under Albert II and Frederick III and, in accordance with pre-modern notions of bureaucracy outside of modern ethical categories, made a profitable private business from the office entrusted to him. The flexible way in which the chancery personnel were remunerated facilitated this "conflict of interest".<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, the late medieval imperial chancery can be imagined as a sort of "private enterprise", which, although being an instrument of the sovereign's rule, had to support itself economically.<sup>24</sup> The chancery members, from the chancellor down to the individual scribes, resided at the court but had no regular salary. Instead, they received a share of the taxes levied and then distributed among them,<sup>25</sup> gifts and bribes from the recipients as well as occasional ecclesiastical benefices, small estates, and rents from the monarch. The chancellor was, of course, the best off by far, but he had to use the income to keep the chancery running at his own expense, for example to buy parchment, paper, wax, and stationery.<sup>26</sup> The chancellor thus increasingly acted as an independent "entrepreneur" in financial terms – a trend that resulted in the lease of the imperial chancery

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A list of Sigismund's privileges issued during his Roman campaign from 1431 to 1433 was elaborated by PROSKE (2018), Anhang, pp. 306–315, no. 2. See also the chart in KLUGE (2021), p. 419. The collection and processing of Sigismund's charters stored in the Italian archives and libraries as part of the new edition of the *Regesta Imperii – Neubearbeitung* represents a long-term research task for the author of this paper.

20 Cf. RAO (2014); WIDDER (1993).

21 SCHUBERT (1979), pp. 185–187; HEINIG (1988), p. 248.

22 For Schlick, see ELBEL–ZAJIC (2012 and 2013a–b); for the concept of "grey eminences", cf. DUMONT–DÜNNEBEIL–ZAJIC (in press).

23 HEINIG (1988), pp. 248–249; generally, see also HEINIG (2003), *passim*.

24 SEELIGER (1887), p. 45: "Die Kanzlei erscheint uns in ihren Grundlagen als wirtschaftliche Privatunternehmung, ausgestattet mit Monopolrecht." This view was also adopted by ISENMANN (1980a), p. 56, and KLUGE (2021), p. 274.

25 It can be further distinguished between a fee for the chancellor and much lower *bibalia* for the other chancery personnel: SEELIGER (1887), pp. 44–50; BRESSLAU (1889), vol. 1, p. 414; KLUGE (2021), p. 272.

26 For the remuneration of the imperial chancery personnel, see BRESSLAU (1889), vol. 1, pp. 412–418; HLAVÁČEK (1970), pp. 278–282; KLUGE (2021), pp. 272–276; for the situation in German princely chanceries, cf. briefly WIDDER (2016), p. 211, note 194; pp. 418, 491–492 and 495–497.

under Frederick III.<sup>27</sup> During Sigismund's reign, the imperial chancery was supplemented by a separate Hungarian chancery, which, however, produced minimal documents for Italian recipients.<sup>28</sup>

Whether the relevant charter was issued in exchange for payment, what the fee amounted to, or whether it was granted free of charge, do not appear in the text itself. The charters themselves testify only to the outcome of the often-difficult negotiations over the price; but their description was not allowed to be given in the concessions for the sake of sovereign's dignity, who sought to give the impression of a ruler with unlimited authority appointed by God and acting on his own initiative. Therefore, the topoi about the reward for "loyal services" repeated in the charters' *narrationes* cannot be trusted. The existence and rough amount of the fee may be deduced more from the type of charter.<sup>29</sup> However, we can learn more about the "financial dimension" of the imperial privileges' grants from other sources, with perhaps the most comprehensive picture being provided by the correspondence of the ambassadors-suplicants commissioned to obtain the charters on behalf of their masters at the imperial court. In contrast to the official documents emanating from the chancery, the diplomats did not spare themselves the piquant descriptions of a series of behind-the-scenes negotiations, the bribery of courtiers and chancery personnel, lobbying and manipulation, etc. The ambassadors could not afford to return empty-handed and therefore had to use all possible means to get their way: the well-known saying "the ends justify the means" applied here more than anywhere else.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, it is necessary to add a few words about the recipients of imperial charters, who were a diverse group of polities and actors, ranging from princes, rulers of cities and republics, to secular and ecclesiastical institutions, communes, and individuals. They all sought privileges from the Holy Roman Emperor, who still represented the only source of legitimacy within the Empire. They wanted to legitimise their often legally dubious position of power, to secure confirmation of old privileges, or to obtain prestigious individual graces, while the presence of the monarch directly encouraged such requests. Typologically, a wide range of different confirmations and investitures, through ennoblements, legitimations, granting coats of arms, to *litterae consiliariatus/familiaritatis/cappellanatus/palatinatus/doctoratus/notariatus* etc. are thus represented among the documents issued.<sup>31</sup> The general remarks outlined above will become apparent in the three following case studies.

27 See SEELIGER (1887); ISENMANN (1980a), pp. 56–61; KLUGE (2021), pp. 272–276 and 413–442.

28 For Sigismund's Hungarian chancery, or rather chanceries, see KONDOR (2009). The issue of the so-called Bohemian department within the imperial chancery, which turned out to be a mere historiographical fiction, was recently addressed by ELBEL (2020). The charters issued by the independent *Reichshofgerichtskanzlei* as well as, later during Frederick III's reign, the Austrian chancery are left aside here. For these institutions and their documentary production, see BATTENBERG (1974); HEINIG (1997), vol. 1, pp. 576–632.

29 See HLAVÁČEK (1970), pp. 271–273. The unreliability of the information contained in the *narrationes* of Sigismund's charters, which respected the formulary of a given type of document rather than the actual course of events, was demonstrated by ELBEL (2019a).

30 For the activities of Italian ambassadors at the imperial court around 1400, see SCHMIDT (2020); for the reign of Frederick III and Maximilian I, cf. KRIEGER (2002); SCHWARZ (2013); LUTTER (1998).

31 For these kinds of charters, see BEINHOFF (1995); KINTZINGER (2000), pp. 165ff.; ELBEL (2015).

## Mantua, 1432

Members of the Gonzaga dynasty had ruled Mantua since 1328.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the Late Middle Ages this small but strategically located city in the Po Valley found itself in a conflict zone between Milan and Venice. The “besieged identity”<sup>33</sup> was also reflected in the rather intense communication with the imperial court, where the Gonzaga sought protection from their more powerful neighbours, but also legal confirmation of their own status.<sup>34</sup> The lords of Mantua in fact ruled as imperial vicars, i.e. *de jure* as officials of the Holy Roman King/Emperor, from whom they had to repeatedly obtain the respective privileges and receive investitures.<sup>35</sup> These concessions, perceived as a diminution of imperial rights in Italy, were usually heavily paid for.

Perhaps the most famous episode is the visit of the Mantuan ambassador Bonifacio delle Coppe da Montefalco, who in 1383 attempted to obtain a vicariate charter for his lord at the Prague court of King Wenceslas, for which the royal counsellors initially demanded 100,000 fl. However, the skilful diplomat managed to reduce these exorbitant demands to 20,000 fl. (the amount of the fee actually paid remains unknown, but it was undoubtedly much lower).<sup>36</sup> In 1403, Francesco Gonzaga was granted the title of margrave by the deposed and imprisoned King Wenceslas in Vienna under bizarre circumstances, but the privilege was not used. A year later a vicariate charter from King Rupert followed. However, the financial background of both these concessions cannot be ascertained.<sup>37</sup>

In what follows, the period of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga (1407–1444), whose reign partly overlaps with that of Sigismund, will be discussed.<sup>38</sup> In 1413, immediately after the monarch's arrival in Italy, negotiations began for the granting of new privileges: although the king refused to grant the title of margrave because he had not yet been crowned in Aachen, he did have a vicariate charter issued. However, when the representative of the chancery, Protonotary Johannes Kirchen, brought the charters to Mantua, they were refused. According to the ambassador Fra Gaspare da Mantova, “these privileges were not accepted, partly because they did not seem sufficiently complete, and partly because too great a sum of money was demanded for them”.<sup>39</sup>

32 For the Gonzaga dynasty and Mantua, see, among others, CONIGLIO (1958), vol. 1; CONIGLIO (1987); LAZZARINI (1996).

33 LAZZARINI (2007).

34 SCHMIDT (2020).

35 For the imperial vicariate, see FAVREAU-LILIE (2000); ZORZI (2013).

36 KNOTT (1898–1899), Beilage, pp. 345–357, no. 2, or SCHMIDT (2022), pp. 42–54, no. 5 (27th May [1383]). The episode is also registered by HLAVÁČEK (1970), Anhang, p. 285, no. 10. For delle Coppe and his mission, see FAVREAU-LILIE (2001), pp. 323–328; SCHMIDT (2020), esp. pp. 39–47 and 215–216.

37 See SCHMIDT (2020), pp. 92ff. and 99ff.

38 For Gianfrancesco Gonzaga and his relations to Sigismund, see TARDUCCI (1902a–b); ROBERTS (1981); LAZZARINI (2000); KOVÁCS (2016), or the as yet unpublished German version KOVÁCS (in press; I am grateful to the author for providing me with the translation); SCHMIDT (2020), pp. 110–167.

39 CENCI (1965), p. 253, or SCHMIDT (2022), pp. 80–81, no. 20: *...et ipsa privilegia non fuerunt recepta, tum quia*

Therefore, in the following period, Gianfrancesco Gonzaga ruled without having his position formally legalised by the sovereign, relying on the protection of the Venetian Republic. As a result, he joined the camp of Sigismund's sworn enemy. From the late 1420s onwards, he attempted to re-establish relations with the royal court through Venice, but the final negotiations did not take place until Sigismund's descent into Italy in the spring of 1432, when the monarch began to offer a rapprochement with the Republic of St Mark. The talks in this delicate situation for Gonzaga were conducted by the veteran Mantuan diplomat Simone da Crema; Vice-Chancellor Kaspar Schlick and Secretary Hermann Hecht oversaw the negotiations on behalf of the sovereign. However, other players and courtiers such as Brunoro della Scala and Cardinal Branda Castiglioni also entered informally into the matter.<sup>40</sup> Thanks to the preservation of sources, the negotiations at Sigismund's court can be followed almost day by day.<sup>41</sup>

On 8th April 1432, an entry in the Venetian Senate registers states that Sigismund demanded 12,000 fl. for the title of margrave, which Gonzaga managed to reduce to 8,000, hoping for an even greater discount to 6,000.<sup>42</sup> Two weeks later, on 23rd April, Simone da Crema arrived at the royal court in Parma, to whom Sigismund, at his first audience, appointed Kaspar Schlick and Brunoro della Scala as auditors. They were apparently to act as a point of contact. The same evening the ambassador dined with them and presented the vice-chancellor with a gift of purple cloth. The following day, after a secret meeting of the royal council, to which da Crema had no access, Sigismund announced his decision not to confirm King Wenceslas's old privilege but to grant a brand new one to the lord of Mantua. Subsequently, the king ordered Schlick to draw up a draft to be sent to Gonzaga for approval without delay. On 25th April, the draft was written that day in the chancery, with the Mantuan diplomat also contributing to the text.<sup>43</sup>

In his dispatch, Simone da Crema reported how Sigismund came to him the same evening, handed him the draft ready to be sent and thanked him for the 10,000 fl. the ambassador offered on behalf of his master, which the king said he intended to accept only as a loan, while he would make the elevation gratis out of love for Gonzaga.<sup>44</sup> Thus,

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*non fuerunt visa bene plena, tum quia petebatur nimis magna suma pecuniarum pro eis* [post 26th March 1414]. For Johannes Kirchen, see MORAW (1969), pp. 488–498.

40 For Crema, Hecht, della Scala, and Castiglioni, see NORI (1984); HEINIG (1997), vol. 1, pp. 683–686; SCHMIDT (in press); GIRGENSOHN (1979).

41 The course of negotiations has already been described in the scholarly literature several times. See KOVÁCS (2016), pp. 89–95; PROSKE (2018), pp. 207–212; SCHMIDT (2020), pp. 140–153. The following account is focused mainly on financial aspects of the imperial concession.

42 Archivio di Stato di Venezia (hereafter ASVen), Senato, Secreti, reg. 12, fol. 84r, partially quoted in RTA X, pp. 368–369, no. 220: *...exposuerit, quod serenissimum dominum Romanorum regem ad eum* [i.e. to Gonzaga] *misisse et requiri fecisse, ut ei det ducatos 12 000 et demum devenerit ad 8 000, quodque speret eum reducere ad ducatos 6 000 et quod pro ipsa summa contentus erit eum constituere et creare marchionem et confirmare sibi vicariatuum suum ac eum absolvere ab eundo secum Romam.*

43 LUZIO (1913b), pp. 174–176, no. 27, or SCHMIDT (2022), pp. 87–89, no. 23 (26th April 1432).

44 SCHMIDT (2022), pp. 89–90, no. 23: *“...queli X<sup>m</sup> ducati, li quali tu ne ay proferidi per sua parte, deli quali molto lo regraciamo dela liberalitate soa, perché quelì non rechedesimo so no in prestedo, e che sia certo, che senza pagamento alcuno lo faremo marchexe de Mantoa, e che sa bene, che, se per pagamento lo facesimo, lo cosa andaria molto alta, ma, como altra volta te abbiamo dito, solo lo bono amore, la bona afecione, che noy lo portiamo, ne move a questo...”*

the financially hard-pressed monarch must have raised again the previously negotiated sum of 6,000 fl. The request for a “loan” in exchange for the king’s privilege is also attested in Venetian sources,<sup>45</sup> but this vocabulary should certainly not mislead a historian: it was merely a euphemistic expression to preserve the honour of the monarch, who did not want to lower himself to the level of a merchant. The ruler of Mantua apparently agreed to this game and did not expect restitution.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, the ambassador estimated that he would need another 800 fl. to pay to the chancery for the work and the golden bull, although he would try to reduce the sum.<sup>47</sup> The logistics of the privilege’s release and the handing over of the money is interesting. The 800 fl. was to be sent directly to the ambassador in Parma so that he could obtain the charter from the chancery, while the 10,000 fl. for the sovereign was to be delivered to a certain inn in Reggio Emilia, a town where the margrave d’Este ruled and which therefore constituted a sort of neutral ground. Da Crema was to attend the handover in person and with the charter in his hand – otherwise the money was not to be released.<sup>48</sup>

Later at night, Sigismund had the ambassador summoned and urged him again to make an inquiry about the money, as he said he needed to proceed further into Tuscany. The sovereign’s desperate need for liquidity thus came openly to the fore.<sup>49</sup> In this connection, Simone expressed some concern that the king might want the 10,000 fl. before the privilege’s release, rather than at Reggio, fearing a possible stratagem, but in the end the monarch apparently went along with the original scenario.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, Gonzaga was approached in writing by Secretary Hermann Hecht, who conveyed the greetings of the royal chancery, whose financial claims, i.e. the tax, were still to be settled with the future margrave of Mantua. In addition, he asked to be present at the investiture ceremony, which was obviously associated with considerable prestige and financial

45 ASVen, Senato, Secreti, reg. 12, fol. 88r: *...prefatus serenissimus rex requirit ab eo maiorem summam pecuniarum, quam credebatur, ac insuper scribat, quod illas pecunias petit mutuo et non pro confirmando sibi iura sui vicariatus*. Cf. RTA X, p. 369, no. 222 (23rd April 1432).

46 Cf. also the similarly hypocritical expression of Secretary Hermann Hecht in his letter to Gonzaga: SCHMIDT (2022), p. 92, no. 24: *Non propter pecunias, videlicet illos X<sup>m</sup> ducatos, quos magnificentia vestra sue maiestati non in mutuo, sed in dono per nos dare obtulit, sed liberaliter et sine aliquali conditione pecunie atque legaliter facere se dixit...* (27th April 1432).

47 SCHMIDT (2022), p. 90, no. 23: *...fia mandato li dinari per la bola e per la canzelaria, che, penso, non se porà fare cum meno de ducati DCCC, zoè ducati 800, ma se alcuna cosa porò sperare, lo farò cum quello più honesto modo, che porò.*

48 SCHMIDT (2022), p. 90, no. 23: *Li diti dinari fiano mandati subito a Rezo per meso suficiente al’ostaria Dal Chavaleto, chi è dentro dala tera e non fia dati a persona, che mie lettere portase, se non me vede personalmente cum lo prevelegio, salvo che li ducati DCCC mi bixognerà aver qui per liberare el dito prevelegio de canzelaria.*

49 For Sigismund’s precarious financial situation during his stay in Italy, which made him dependent on local powers, see PROSKE (2018), pp. 134–151. As historiography has correctly recognised, it was precisely the financial motives that made the king so willingly grant the princely title to Gonzaga: *ibid.*, p. 207.

50 SCHMIDT (2022), p. 90, no. 23: *I(llu)stre s(ignor) mio, el me va per la mente, che, se lo re volese avere li dinari in anci, che a me fuse delivrado el prevelezo, non so, como honestamente li posese denegare, ché, se io dicesse a coluy, che portarà el prevelegio fino a Rezo, a quello darò li dinari, chi seria el più honesto, luy poria dire: “Tu non te fide de mi, como me debio fidare de ti, ché poy, che tu avese lo prevelegio in Rezo, dove non ho posanza, tu me lo posese fare” e più altre caxone.*

reward.<sup>51</sup> The communication probably dragged on because of the complicated political situation of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga, who was not in Mantua but in Brescia, where he served as a condottiere in the service of Venice, which was still in a hostile relationship with the Holy Roman King.

On 5th May 1432, the coast was already clear in Parma, for on that day Kaspar Schlick sent a congratulatory letter to his “relative” Gianfrancesco. It should be noted that the vice-chancellor at this time began to spread the legend of his descent from the counts of Collalto, as well as his alleged kinship with the Gonzaga and other Italian families, who apparently accepted this narrative. Historical scholarship has traditionally labelled this seemingly implausible construction as Schlick’s fiction to “improve” his pedigree and social status, but some new evidence suggests that it may not have been mere fraud. Sorting out this complicated tangle of relationships thus remains a task for further research.<sup>52</sup> In his letter to Gonzaga, Schlick wrote, among other things, that he could not agree on the matter of chancery tax with Simone da Crema, who did not have enough money with him. These claims were therefore to be settled directly in Mantua by Hermann Hecht, who was to hand over the privilege to the margrave. Schlick himself waived the claim to his own reward in view of his “kinship” with the recipient.<sup>53</sup> Da Crema’s initial concern that the charter would not be released from the chancery prior to the payment of the tax was therefore not confirmed.

The actual privilege bears the date of 6th May<sup>54</sup> and on the following day the representatives of both parties met in Reggio, where the 10,000 fl. were handed over. The transaction was carried out on behalf of the king by Ladislav Csapi, a member of Sigismund’s Hungarian secret chancery, and Hermann Hecht; and on behalf of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga by Simone da Crema and his nephew Giovanni, who received a payment receipt.<sup>55</sup> Subsequently, Hecht brought the charter to Mantua.<sup>56</sup> From later reports it appears that the king’s secretary managed to negotiate some money – but apparently not the amount he had imagined. In

51 SCHMIDT (2022), p. 94, no. 24: *Item cancellaria imperialis, que huiusmodi solemnitatibus gaudere consuevit, recommendat se vestre magnificencie et sperat, quod ipsam liberaliter expeditis, in cuius expeditione volo esse bonus vester promotor et adiutor.*

52 For the last attempt to make sense of this complicated issue, see ELBEL (2019b).

53 SCHMIDT (2022), pp. 97–98, no. 26: *...super debito autem cancellarie cum nobili viro Symeone de Crema concordari non potuit, quia non erat sufficienter suffultus. Idcirco mittitur per dominos cancellarie ad d(ominacionem) v(estram) Hermannus prefatus, cui vestra d(ominacio) in dicendis credat et se erga ipsos dominos legalem ostendat; collacio enim graciaram ita requirit et pro futuris serviciis eciam est cura habenda. Illud autem, quod ad partem meam cedere posset, v(estre) d(ominacioni) ad honorem liberaliter et letanter relaxo et ita de toto facerem, si me contingeret... (5th May [1432]).*

54 A contemporary copy is preserved, among others, in Archivio di Stato di Mantova (hereafter ASMn), Archivio Gonzaga, busta 85bis, fols. 1r–2r, edited in DUMONT (1726), vol. 2/2, pp. 251–253, no. 156; cf. RI XI/2, p. 213, no. 9126. The text of the privilege largely coincided with the original charter of King Wenceslas from 1403, to which a passage from his coat-of-arms grant, also issued in 1403, was added.

55 ASMn, Archivio Gonzaga, b. 326, no. 83. For Ladislav Csapi and Giovanni da Crema, see SCHMIDT (2020), pp. 213–214 and 224–225. Venetian chronicler Marin Sanudo Jr., CARACCILO ARICÒ–FRISON (1999), vol. 1, p. 112, in his chronicle – probably based on the above-quoted entry in the registers of the Venetian senate – mistakenly stated that Gonzaga paid 12,000 fl. for his elevation, and the same amount has often been assumed by the historical scholarship that did not know the payment receipt issued by Csapi and Hecht.

56 See Sigismund’s letters to Gonzaga in SCHMIDT (2022), pp. 98–99, no. 27; p. 99, no. 28 (7th May 1432).

his urgent request to the lord of Mantua in July 1432, he reminded him of the remuneration promised earlier and how some people thought that he would receive 1,000 fl. for his services as liaison and chancery member, but in the end, he received much less. He therefore asked for at least another 100 fl., which he was willing to accept as a loan and which he said he desperately needed (he had even sold his weapons and horses!) to go on a diplomatic mission to the German princes on behalf of the sovereign.<sup>57</sup> Whether Hecht eventually received anything is not known.

The delayed margravian investiture finally took place on 22nd September 1433 in the emperor's presence.<sup>58</sup> On this occasion, another confirmation charter with a golden bull was issued, but its "financial dimension" cannot be inferred due to the silence of the sources – probably only a chancery tax was paid in this case, but no longer a fee for the sovereign, as no new concession occurred.<sup>59</sup> Sigismund's personal performance of the investiture and the granting of a new privilege *auctoritate cesarea* could, after all, be seen as a sort of reward to Gonzaga for the hospitality provided to the imperial court.

To conclude: as far as the actual financial aspects are concerned, the existence of two components of the price for the privilege could be confirmed: 10,000 fl. went directly to Sigismund's treasury (curiously, however, he claimed the sum as a loan, which of course he never repaid and certainly did not intend to); another 800 fl., or perhaps a little less, were given to the chancery (Vice-Chancellor Schlick renounced his share, while Secretary Hecht received less than he expected and so later asked for more money). The fee and the tax were eventually paid after the actual release of the privilege from the chancery, but for the greater peace of mind of both parties the handover of the 10,000 fl. took place on the "neutral" territory of the margrave d'Este. The chancery personnel was rewarded not only with money, but also with gifts (the vice-chancellor received precious cloth) and prestige (Schlick attempted to become Sigismund's procurator in the investiture ceremony<sup>60</sup> and Hecht sought to attend this solemn event too). At the same time, the importance of the personal ties and multiple loyalties of the chancery members involved and of the Mantuan ambassador, which were reflected in their mutual

57 SCHMIDT (2022), pp. 104–105, no. 33: *Et licet sufficientem exinde recepi consolationem, non tamen talem, qualem alii estimaverunt dicentes et credentes me habere debuisse a d(ominatione) v(estra) mille duc(atos). Quidquid tamen sit, sto contentus de hiis, que michi gratia vestra fecit, unum tamen, illustrissime princeps, a v(estra) d(ominatione) sub speciali confidentia, quam ad eandem gero, quatenus servitiorum meorum intuitu, favorisque et dilectionis causa, quem ad me geritis, centum ducat(os) michi dare velitis, de quibus in rei veritate summoopere indigeo [...]. Quare, mi domine, non derelinquatis me, sed velitis michi de hiis gratiose providere. Promitto enim vestre d(ominationi) sub bona fide, quod pro hiis plurima servitia d(ominationi) v(estre) impendam et, si placet eosdem rehabere, sum promptissimus ad restituendum* (8th July 1432).

58 For more details about the ceremony, see PROSKE (2018), pp. 212–217; KOVÁCS (2016), pp. 96–99.

59 The original of Sigismund's privilege, pointed out by KOVÁCS (2016), p. 99, note 91, is preserved in Archivio di Stato di Milano (hereafter ASMi), Diplomi e dispacci sovrani, Germania, cartella 3, no. 25, edited in DUMONT (1726), vol. 2/2, pp. 269–271, no. 171; cf. RI XI/2, pp. 247–248, no. 9674.

60 Simone da Crema reported that there was a great deal of competition at Sigismund's court as to who would be appointed by the king as his procurator to carry out the margravian investiture, and he expressed the opinion that Schlick would undertake this prestigious act. See LUZIO (1913b), pp. 177–178, no. 27, or SCHMIDT (2022), p. 96, no. 25 (28th April 1432). However, as already noted, the investiture was eventually granted by Sigismund himself on his return journey.

communication, should be emphasised – both the “kinship” of Vice-Chancellor Schlick with Gonzaga, and the subaltern relationship of Secretary Hecht with the newly-made margrave of Mantua,<sup>61</sup> but also the omnipresent Simone da Crema's subjection to the emperor. It can be concluded that the granting of the Mantuan privilege and its payment by the recipient seems like an ideal scenario where both parties fulfilled their obligations without any major delays. As the following two examples will show, this was far from common practice.

## Milan, 1426

The Visconti dynasty came to power in Milan at the end of the 13th century and from 1311 ruled the Lombard capital continuously.<sup>62</sup> During the Trecento, the Milanese *signori* became the most important players in the northern part of the Apennine peninsula, which entailed frequent conflicts with other polities as well as with the Holy Roman King/Emperor, who usually sought to maintain the *status quo* in imperial Italy. The Visconti were able to pay huge sums of money to the imperial treasury in exchange for vicariate privileges: they paid 50,000 fl. to Henry VII, 60,000 fl. to Louis the Bavarian, and even 200,000 fl. to Charles IV, who attempted several times unsuccessfully to subdue them militarily.<sup>63</sup> In 1395, King Wenceslas raised Giangaleazzo Visconti to the status of duke, for which the new imperial prince had to pay him 100,000 fl.<sup>64</sup> As is well known, this concession later appeared among the arguments of the Rhenish prince-electors, who in 1400 deprived Wenceslas of the Roman throne.<sup>65</sup>

The relationship between Sigismund and Duke Filippo Maria Visconti (1412–1447) appears complicated and full of twists and turns.<sup>66</sup> What is clear though is that from the mid-1420s the Lombard prince became the sovereign's main ally on Italian soil as part of his planned *Romzug*, which was also to be a military campaign against Venice.<sup>67</sup> In the summer of 1426, the Milanese embassy consisting of Corrado del Carretto and Guarnerio Castiglioni concluded a treaty of alliance with the king in Visegrád, Hunga-

61 Cf., e.g. Hecht's letter to Gonzaga in SCHMIDT (2022), p. 100, no. 29: *Nulla[m] aliam dominationem post regiam maiestatem quam vestram atque inclitam domum vestram michi gratiosissimam cum omni zelo et affectione venerari preconcepi, quam et cordi meo firmiter impressi ante [...] huius mundi principes, cui, ut opto, pro posse fideliter servire intendo* (23rd May 1432).

62 For the Visconti dynasty, see COGNASSO (1955a); COGNASSO (1955b).

63 SICKEL (1859), pp. 8–9, 14–15 and 24–25. For Charles IV's Italian politics, see WIDDER (1993); PAULER (1997), pp. 175–223.

64 BUENO DE MESQUITA (1941), p. 173. For Giangaleazzo Visconti's elevation, see BLACK (2010); for his relations with Wenceslas, cf. HLAVÁČEK (2000).

65 RTA III, p. 255, no. 204; p. 261, no. 205. For more details, see SCHUBERT (2005), pp. 368–372.

66 For the changing relations between Sigismund and Visconti, see KAGELMACHER (1885); SCHIFF (1909); SOMAINI (2006). The new volume on Filippo Maria goes in a somewhat different direction, cf. CENGARLE-COVINI (2015).

67 PROSKE (2018), pp. 19–25.

ry.<sup>68</sup> Thanks to this momentarily advantageous political configuration, Visconti managed to extort several privileges from Sigismund. The most important was the ducal investiture, which confirmed Wenceslas's earlier concessions.<sup>69</sup> Other privileges included the confirmation of Sigismund's charters from 1418,<sup>70</sup> the legitimation of Visconti's illegitimate daughter Bianca Maria,<sup>71</sup> and the absolution of any offenses against the monarch.<sup>72</sup>

The ducal investiture was issued on 1st July 1426, after which on the 13th of the same month the oath of allegiance of Visconti's procurators was sworn into Sigismund's hands.<sup>73</sup> However, negotiations at the royal court about the price had been ongoing since April at the latest. The monarch apparently promised to grant the charters free of charge "except for a decent remuneration for the chancery" (*excepta tamen cancellarii digna mercede*).<sup>74</sup> Sigismund was willing to waive his claim to a fee because he needed Visconti's support for his upcoming Italian campaign and as a counterweight against the Venetians. This time, however, the chancery tax itself soared to dizzying heights. The Milanese ambassadors were instructed to negotiate the lowest possible sum, promising a maximum of 6,000 fl., with a delay in payment.<sup>75</sup> It was this maximum amount, apparently the total of all the charters, that was finally agreed with the Imperial Chancellor and Bishop of Zagreb, John of Alben.<sup>76</sup>

The granting of the privilege had unpleasant political implications for Sigismund, as by sanctioning Wenceslas's concessions, which were seen as a significant loss for the Empire in Italy, he violated his electoral capitulation to the prince-electors.<sup>77</sup> He therefore kept the charter in his possession until May 1427, when it was finally presented in Milan by the king's

68 RTA X, pp. 35–38, no. 3 [ca. 1st July 1426]. For both Milanese diplomats, see NUTI (1988); PETRUCCI (1979).

69 A contemporary copy is preserved, among others, in ASMi, Sforzesco, cart. 10, no. 804, edited in GIULINI (1857), vol. 7, pp. 291–293; cf. RTA X, p. 38, no. 4; MANARESI (1915), p. 113, reg. 15, no. 53; VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, pp. 146–147, no. 804 (1st July 1426).

70 RI XI/2, p. 45, no. 6678; RTA X, pp. 38–39, no. 5 (6th July 1426). For more information on Sigismund's privileges for Visconti, see *ibid.*, pp. 9–10; SCHIFF (1909), p. 99; for those from 1418, see *ibid.*, pp. 71–73.

71 RI XI/2, p. 46, no. 6693; VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 147, no. 805 (21st July 1426).

72 RI XI/2, p. 48, no. 6714; RTA X, p. 44, no. 10 (18th August 1426).

73 RTA X, pp. 39–40, no. 6.

74 OSIO (1869), vol. 2, pp. 193–194, no. 113; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 10, no. 84 (25th April 1426). Visconti insisted that, because of his momentary insolvency, the ambassadors obtain the privileges from the chancery without paying the tax and negotiate a postponement of the due date. If necessary, they were to draw a promissory note in his name, with the provision that the charters would become invalid in the event of non-payment. The duke was also prepared to deposit the privileges with the margrave del Monferrato until the tax would be settled.

75 OSIO (1869), vol. 2, p. 211, no. 121; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 12, no. 94 (18th May 1426). The lower limit was apparently expected to be 3,000 fl.: OSIO (1869), vol. 2, p. 208, no. 120 (May 1426).

76 OSIO (1869), vol. 2, p. 246, no. 142: *Contenti quoque remanemus, postquam aliter fieri non potuit, quod cum cancellario regio pro dictis privilegiis conveneritis pro sex millibus ducatorum, volentes tamen, quod studeatis protrahere solutionem dicte pecunie ad terminos quo poteritis longiores*. Partially quoted in KAGELMACHER (1885), p. 54, note 4; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 17, no. 129 (2nd August 1426). See also Visconti's letter of thanks to the imperial chancellor in OSIO (1869), vol. 2, p. 247, no. 144 (3rd August 1426). For John of Alben, see FORSTREITER [1924], pp. 82–86.

77 Cf., however, the reservations about the validity of the ducal investiture expressed in RTA X, p. 10, echoed also in the later scholarly literature.

ambassador and Bishop of Veszprém, John Szászi.<sup>78</sup> However, the diplomat made the duke promise to keep the existence of the privilege, issued without the consent of the electors, secret for the duration of Sigismund's life.<sup>79</sup> In return, Visconti gave him a promissory note which reveals interesting details of the transaction. According to this document, the king granted the privilege gratis (*sine aliqua solutione*) and took upon himself the debt owed to his chancery (*satisfaciens ipsamet [...] occasione privilegiorum ipsorum imperiali cancellarie*) because of the duke's temporary inability to pay. Visconti therefore undertook to pay directly to the sovereign 6,000 fl. when he had the money, if the latter demanded it, and only after a two-year postponement.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, Visconti continually apologised to Chancellor Alben that he was temporarily unable to pay him for his services, which the king's ambassador Szászi urged him to do. The duke continued to justify his inability to make the payment on the grounds of increased expenditure on the war with Venice.<sup>81</sup>

In July 1428, Sigismund renounced his claim to the promised 6,000 fl. and transferred it to the imperial chancery, i.e. to the chancellor, the protonotaries and the notaries, handing them over Visconti's promissory note. At the same time, he informed the duke of Milan of this act and demanded payment.<sup>82</sup> This was certainly the initiative of the chancery personnel, who had received nothing from Sigismund, and so wanted to recover their tax themselves – though still with the monarch's support. However, repeated urgings did not change anything. Visconti used the excuse of his dire financial situation and sent the chancellor a sapphire as a peace offering instead of payment.<sup>83</sup> Protonotary Kaspar Schlick, who gradually became the *de facto* head of the chancery, was even better off: for his informal lobbying on behalf of the duke of Milan at the imperial court, he received an annuity of 100 fl., a sapphire set in gold and scarlet cloth, as well as a horse

78 For Szászi and his diplomatic mission to Italy, see FEDELES (2012), pp. 420–421, no. 356, and SCHIFF (1909), p. 108ff., respectively.

79 Visconti's promise is published in OSIO (1869), vol. 2, p. 299, no. 180 (12th and 27th May 1427). For different textual versions of this document, see RTA X, p. 58, no. 25.

80 A copy of Visconti's promissory note, apparently based on the original, is preserved in Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Wien (hereafter HHStA), Reichsregisterbücher, cod. D, fol. 63v (27th May 1427). Two slightly different drafts of the document are stored in ASMi, Sforzesco, cart. 10, nos 145 and 147 (12th and 27th May 1427). For different textual versions, see RTA X, p. 13, note 6; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 27, no. 191. Visconti also thanked Sigismund for transmitting the charters: OSIO (1869), vol. 2, p. 298, no. 179; partially quoted in KAGELMACHER (1885), p. 73, note 2; RTA X, p. 58, no. 25, note 2 (8th May 1427).

81 OSIO (1869), vol. 2, p. 291, no. 174; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 26, no. 184 (30th March 1427); OSIO (1869), vol. 2, p. 303, no. 183; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 28, no. 198 (17th June 1427); OSIO (1869), vol. 2, pp. 309–310, no. 190; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 29, no. 201 (4th July 1427). The references are collected in SCHIFF (1909), p. 108, note 4.

82 HHStA, Reichsregisterbücher, cod. I, fol. 14r, or *ibid.*, cod. D, fols. 63v–64r: *Nos itaque oneribus regnorum nostrorum plurimum prepediti huiusmodi solutionem cancellarie nostre predictae distulimus, nec ei satisfactionem impendimus aliqualem [...], nos a solutione huiusmodi totaliter exoneravimus traducentes ius nostrum, quod in comportacione illorum sex milium florenum apud dilectionem tuam habuimus, pure in venerabilem Io(hannem), episcopum Zagradiensem cancellarium, prothonotarios ac notarios imperialis cancellarie nostre, ut ipsi vice et nomine nostris ac eiam sui parte huiusmodi VI<sup>m</sup> florenum cum littera tua, quam ipsis assignavimus, possint et valeant importare.* Cf. RI XI/2, p. 76, no. 7112; RTA X, pp. 19–20, note 6 (18th July 1428).

83 HHStA, Reichsregisterbücher, cod. D, fol. 63r; a draft in ASMi, Sforzesco, cart. 11, no. 43. Cf. RTA X, p. 76, no. 42, note 3; VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 41, no. 276 (8th September 1428).

and a helmet.<sup>84</sup> He thus received more in “bribes” than the formal head of the chancery himself, with this apparent disproportion corresponding to Schlick’s actual position within this institution. In other words, Milanese diplomacy correctly identified the current balance of power in the imperial chancery and acted accordingly. Further urgings and excuses<sup>85</sup> continued until Sigismund’s descent into Italy in 1431–1433, when – as later vague references suggest – Schlick received repayment of a small part of the debt, probably 600 or 800 fl.<sup>86</sup> At the Council of Basel in late 1433, when Kaspar had already become chancellor and his predecessor in office was dead, he had John of Alben’s heirs confirm his claim to the Milanese debt and request the corresponding Sigismund’s charters and Visconti’s promissory note from the Imperial Protonotary Peter Kalde to be handed over to Schlick.<sup>87</sup> Subsequently, he treated the claim as an entirely private matter.

Following the rift between Emperor Sigismund and Filippo Maria Visconti after 1433, the issue of Schlick’s claims in Milan became complicated. In April 1435, the Milanese ambassadors to the imperial court did indeed bring some of the money, but they were ordered first to ascertain the sovereign’s attitude towards their lord, and only if they judged it favourable, and if Visconti would benefit, were they to pay the amount due to the chancellor. If, however, they found that Sigismund persisted in his hostility, they were to pay nothing, say that they had no money, and apologise.<sup>88</sup> Apparently, this is what must have happened in the end. This situation thus shows how the Milanese debt became an eminently political argument. Visconti did not pay and Schlick therefore exacted a charter from Sigismund in early 1437, allowing him to collect the amount owed by force on the

84 OSIO (1869), vol. 2, pp. 390–391, no. 260; SANTORO (1983), vol. 3, p. 187, no. 199; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 41, no. 277 (8th September 1428); ASMi, Sforzesco, cart. 11, no. 172; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 57, no. 377 (22nd October 1430); RTA X, p. 96, no. 55; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 60, no. 401 (19th March 1431).

85 HHStA, Reichsregisterbücher, cod. D, fols. 64r–v [ca. 1429]; fols. 64v–65/ar [ca. 1429]; OSIO (1869), vol. 2, p. 427, no. 295; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 49, no. 327 (14th December 1429); OSIO (1869), vol. 2, p. 428, no. 296; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 49, no. 325 (14th December 1429).

86 In 1443, Visconti claimed to have paid 800 fl. “ten years ago” in Milan (*iam decenio elapso eidem in hac civitate solvimus*): ASMi, Registri ducali, reg. 49, fol. 154r (p. 317), or *ibid.*, Cimeli, Appendice, no. 22, fol. 7v. Schlick visited the Lombard capital in November and December 1431 with Sigismund and then in February 1432 as the king’s ambassador, see ELBEL–ZAJIC (2012), p. 75. In 1435, for a change, Visconti spoke of 5,400 fl. as the remaining debt: OSIO (1872), vol. 3, p. 126, no. 133. However, other sources still refer to 6,000 fl., not diminished by 600 or 800 fl. The chronology and context of a note saying that the Milanese ambassador Bartolomeo Mosca paid 60 fl. in the imperial chancery *pro scripturis ducalibus* remain unclear and may refer to other charters: ASMi, Sforzesco, cart. 11, no. 113; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 155, no. 833 (with a hypothetical dating to 1428/1429).

87 Copies of testimonies issued by both the executors (*testamentarii*) of John of Alben’s will and his brother Rudolf are preserved in ASMi, Sforzesco, cart. 13, no. 84; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 164, no. 863 (15th December 1433); ASMi, Sforzesco, cart. 13, no. 85; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 163, no. 862 (15th December 1433). For Kalde, incorrectly referred to as *secretarius* in the source, see HEINIG (1997), vol. 1, pp. 705–708.

88 OSIO (1872), vol. 3, pp. 126–127, no. 133; cf. VITTANI (1929), vol. 2, p. 95, no. 611; RTA XII, p. 163, no. 101, note 2 (21st April 1435). Also, the ambassadors were to try to argue that Sigismund had allegedly verbally promised to grant privileges free of charge, but Visconti was to be unaware of this promise and so he issued the promissory note. This was obviously a fallacious argument: as has been demonstrated above, the king had indeed issued the charters gratis, but the 6,000 fl. were a chancery tax.

duke's estates.<sup>89</sup> However, this was just a gesture with no real consequences.

After Sigismund's death and during the short reign of King Albert II (1438–1439), as well as during the following period until 1443, when Schlick was removed from the leadership of the imperial chancery for political reasons, the matter subsided.<sup>90</sup> Schlick revived his Milanese claims only during the diplomatic mission to Italy in 1442 on behalf of Frederick III.<sup>91</sup> As part of his return journey, he visited Milan, where Visconti was to promise him “not only to pay the debt, but to show greater mercy”.<sup>92</sup> On 27th July 1443, i.e. after Schlick's official return to the chancellorship, an agreement was reached through procurators to compensate the chancellor at least partially. As a result, he was to receive a pledge of income from Confienza, a town near Pavia, amounting to 3,000 fl. with an annuity of 300 fl. The agreement thus did not actually grant Schlick the right to hold and use the property (*reservatis tamen prefato domino duci et camere sue aliis iuribus et intratis ac custodia dicti loci*), but merely reserved a portion of the revenues to him until the repayment of the debt.<sup>93</sup>

Two Italian lawyers – Niccolò Arcimboldi of Parma, counsellor to the duke of Milan, and Alberico Maletta of Pavia, in the service of the lord of Ferrara – intervened on his behalf in person, and letters of intercession were even sent by Margrave Leonello d'Este.<sup>94</sup> It should also be noted that Schlick's procurators, Arcimboldi and Beltramino de' Terzi, whom he had empowered to arrange the transaction, were also supposed to be his “relatives”.<sup>95</sup> Again, the question of whether this was a real kinship or a fiction must be left aside; what matters is the fact that Schlick managed, thanks to this relation, to activate these individuals to his advantage. Filippo Maria Visconti was undoubtedly only persuaded to take this step because Schlick had regained his place in the imperial chancery together with his former influence, otherwise it would have been easy to ignore his claims.<sup>96</sup>

89 RTA XII, pp. 162–163, no. 101 ([22nd January] 1437).

90 For Schlick's temporary removal from the chancellorship and his return, see ELBEL–ZAJIC (2012), pp. 127–135; HEINIG (1997), vol. 1, pp. 638–646.

91 Schlick's attempts to recover the Milanese debt in the 1440s are summarized in HUFNAGEL (1911), pp. 398ff.; ELBEL–ZAJIC (2012), pp. 130–132, based on Enea Silvio Piccolomini's correspondence.

92 Schlick's letter to Visconti in WOLKAN (1909), vol. 1/2, pp. 15–16, no. 9: *Cum nuper Mediolanum ivissem, certum modum vestra excellentia reperit, per quem mihi pro summa debita satisfieret, illumque consiliariis expediendum commisit, ostendens mihi, servitori suo, non solum debitum velle facere, sed etiam gratiam ampliorem impendere* [ca. May 1443]. Cf. also his letter to Niccolò Arcimboldi *ibid.*, pp. 42–43, no. 23 [ca. July 1443]. A similar statement is found in Schlick's full powers cited in the following footnote.

93 The agreement containing the text of Schlick's and Visconti's full powers for their procurators, dating from 1st May and 20th July 1443 respectively, is preserved in ASMi, Registri ducali, reg. 49, fols. 151r–158r (pp. 311–325); Visconti's *procuratorium* also *ibid.*, Cimeli, Appendice, no. 22, fols. 7v–8r. Cf. MANARESI (1915), p. 109, reg. 15, no. 32; BOGNETTI (1927), p. 310, no. 95; COVINI (2005), Tabella 1, p. 161, no. 23. Except for NOVOTNÝ (2015), p. 96, note 307, the German and Czech literature has failed to identify the locality of *Confluentia* as Confienza.

94 WOLKAN (1909), vol. 1/2, p. 81, no. 43 (16th September 1443); p. 83, no. 44 (16th September 1443); p. 89, no. 45 [16th September 1443]; p. 91, no. 47 (17th September 1443). For Arcimboldi and Maletta, see RAPONI (1961); COVINI (2007).

95 For de' Terzi, see CONT (2016), pp. 115–116, 120–121, and Tavola genealogica A, p. 134.

96 Similarly, see HUFNAGEL (1911), p. 398.

As is evident from the correspondence that followed, Schlick was not entirely satisfied with the agreement: “When I couldn’t have what I should have had and wanted, I wanted what I could have”, he wrote to Maletta. Indeed, the value of the pledge amounted to only half of the debt; moreover, he continued to seek physical possession of Confienza, rather than merely to collect part of the revenues, using to this end his Italian friends and “relatives”.<sup>97</sup> It is also doubtful that Schlick actually received the promised annuity. Indeed, as late as September 1443 he himself had asked Maletta to press for the first instalment of 300 fl., lest the matter go to waste.<sup>98</sup> It can be assumed that this is exactly what happened.

Nor did Kaspar Schlick obtain Confienza in the end. Following Filippo Maria Visconti’s death in August 1447, the chancellor, together with the humanist and new Bishop of Trieste, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, was sent by King Frederick III to Milan to secure the duchy for the Empire.<sup>99</sup> In addition to his official task, Schlick also intended to enforce his claims to Confienza, having the support of the king in this matter.<sup>100</sup> However, when the ambassadors arrived, they found Lombardy in chaos, with Confienza in the possession of Duke Louis of Savoy.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, both Schlick and Piccolomini attempted to assert the claims with Louis himself by correspondence, but undoubtedly to no avail.<sup>102</sup>

Awareness of the Milanese debt survived in the Schlick family – apparently because Filippo Maria Visconti’s promissory note from 1427 remained in the possession of Kaspar’s heirs. In the division of the family property in 1472, Visconti’s unfulfilled obligations were also taken into account.<sup>103</sup> The last attempt to enforce the claim was made in 1498 by Kaspar II Schlick, nephew of the former chancellor.<sup>104</sup> Supported by King Maximilian I and Duke Eric I of Brunswick-Lüneburg, he approached the Duke of Milan,

97 WOLKAN (1909), vol. 1/2, pp. 81–82, no. 43: *...prosequi velitis, curantes, si possibile sit, ut ex integro castrum habeam cum jurisdictione, quam res posse fieri...* Ibid., pp. 84–85, no. 44: *...cum non possem habere quod debui et volui, id volui quod potui. Recepi enim pro sex millibus ducatorum solum tria milia, sperans, quod ille princeps graciosus in tempore posset et vellet mihi melius facere. [...] Rogo etiam ut cogitetis, si modus sit, quemadmodum sentire videmini, quod ego possum castellum illud Confluentie ex integro et cum jurisdictione habere, et ad id velitis laborare...* The last two passages are also quoted in HUFNAGEL (1911), p. 399, note 1, and ELBEL–ZAJIC (2012), p. 131, note 256, respectively.

98 WOLKAN (1909), vol. 1/2, pp. 85, no. 44: *...Mediolanum peteretis illos trecentos ducatos pro me recuperaturi, sicut scribitis, quia, nisi per vestram sollicitudinem habeantur, omnis labor incassum ibit.*

99 For the Milanese mission, see HUFNAGEL (1911), pp. 405–419; the history of Milan after Visconti’s death is recounted in COGNASSO (1955c); for Piccolomini’s engagement in Frederick III’s service, see HEINIG (1997), vol. 1, pp. 530–531 and 737–739; LUGER (2016), pp. 49–64.

100 HUFNAGEL (1911), p. 408.

101 HUFNAGEL (1911), p. 417, with reference to the embassy’s report to Frederick III published in CHMEL (1837), vol. 1, p. 268, no. 111/i: *...der von Saffoy hat [...] auch etlich castell yngenomen, ouch Koblencz [i.e. Confienza], das hern Gaspars des canczler gewesen ist...* [ca. October/November 1447]. See also SICKEL (1856), pp. 204–205; SOMMO (2012), vol. 2, p. 17; for the possession of Confienza in the later Quattrocento, cf. COVINI (2005), Tabella 1, p. 163, no. 34.

102 Piccolomini’s letter to Louis of Savoy in WOLKAN (1912), vol. 2, pp. 65–66, no. 20 [October/November 1447].

103 NOVOTNÝ (2015), pp. 96–97 and 201. The author correctly linked this Milanese debt to Schlick’s former claim to Confienza.

104 For the place of Kaspar II within the Schlick genealogy, see NOVOTNÝ (2015), p. 279.

Ludovico Sforza, at the same time offering to waive his old claim if the Italian prince would grant a place at the University of Pavia for his unnamed son as a student together with a preceptor for seven or eight years.<sup>105</sup> In response, the Milanese duke declared the debt settled, saying that his predecessors had certainly sufficiently repaid Chancellor Schlick, but he granted the second part of the request.<sup>106</sup> Thereby the issue was apparently settled satisfactorily for both parties.

The example of the privileges for Filippo Maria Visconti in 1426 shows a completely different scenario to the case of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga. Sigismund gave up his fee because he needed to keep the duke of Milan as an ally. However, this time the chancery tax was valued at the considerably higher sum of 6,000 fl. The way the debt was handled after the release of privileges to the recipient, which occurred only a year apart, also deserves attention. Sigismund granted the charters gratis and took the debt to the chancery upon himself. As he paid nothing to the chancery, after two years of vain importunities he transferred the claim to the chancery, which was to recover it itself from Visconti. After the chancellor's death, his successor Kaspar Schlick took over the matter, at the same time insuring his claims against John of Alben's heirs. The sources show that Visconti's excuses for his dire financial situation were not entirely true: in fact, the duke only intended to pay if he could benefit from it at the imperial court. Schlick's attempts culminated in the mid-1440s when he received the pledge of income from Confienza. However, he probably did not collect the annuity at all and never held the Lombard town. Filippo Maria Visconti therefore ended up paying only a few hundred florins of the entire debt, but he at least rewarded the chancellor with valuable gifts. Half a century later, Schlick's nephew Kaspar II, who attempted to recover the Milanese claims at the court of Ludovico Sforza, apparently no longer believed in success, thus using the old matter as a leverage to secure a place at the University of Pavia for his son.

## Venice, 1437

Unlike the margraviate of Mantua and the duchy of Milan, which formed part of the Holy Roman Empire, Venice was a relic of the Byzantine dominion in Italy and had thus developed into an autonomous polity.<sup>107</sup> Originally small but extremely wealthy due to its

105 See Sforza's instructions to his ambassador at the imperial court, Erasmo Brasca, in ASMi, Sforzesco, cart. 586, sub dato: *Havemo visto quanto strettamente recomendati m(esser) Gaspar Qilich [sic!] de ordine dela ces(are) m(aes)ità et quello dice non se debii havere tanto consideratione alli puochi fundamenti che ha la domanda sua quanto alli benemeriti deli mazori et alli amici [che] ha in corte. Però havendo ricevuto da lui una l(ette)ra in la quale specifica che dandosi un loco da studiare a Pavia per un fiolo et magistro ne farà la absolutione, se siamo risolti como vedereti per [l'i]ncluso exemplo dela risposta a lui, quello puotereti parlando in conformitate* (9th September 1498).

106 Contemporary copies of Sforza's responses to Schlick and Duke Eric are preserved in HHStA, Reichsregisterbücher, cod. LL, fol. 80r, and ASMi, Sforzesco, cart. 586, sub dato: *Nobis procul dubio persuademus illustrissimos quondam maiores nostros amplissime remuneratos esse dominum Casparem predictum et ceteros, quicumque pro eis laboraverunt, proinde nihil esse, quod iure a nobis peti possit*. Cf. RI XIV/2/2, p. 737, no. 8834 (9th September 1498). Schlick's and Duke Eric's letters to Sforza could not be found in Milan.

107 For a history of Venice, see, e.g. LANE (1973); COZZI-KNAPTON (1986).

commercial activity in the Mediterranean, the maritime republic abandoned its former neutrality at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries and began to assert its influence more strongly in north-eastern Italy. In 1404, in response to the aggressive policy of Francesco Novello da Carrara taking advantage of the disintegration of the Milanese duchy following Giangaleazzo Visconti's death († 1402), the Venetians launched a vigorous expansion into the *Terraferma* and soon succeeded in occupying virtually all of present-day Veneto.<sup>108</sup>

These territories, however, formally belonged to the Empire and until then local dynasties had ruled them as representatives of the emperor. The new Holy Roman King, Sigismund, had therefore been trying to reclaim these lands since the beginning of his reign in 1411. Nevertheless, despite initial successes of the imperial/Hungarian army, the war in the 1410s ended in failure, whereupon the *Serenissima* took the entire patriarchate of Aquileia.<sup>109</sup> Hostility to the Republic of St Mark remained a defining feature of the “last Luxemburg’s” Italian policy until his Roman expedition, when a truce was signed with Venice in 1433, followed even by an alliance against the Duke of Milan, Filippo Maria Visconti, in 1435.

The granting or rather confirmation of imperial (and also Dalmatian) territories in exchange for a large indemnity was a constant theme in the diplomatic relations between Sigismund and the Venetian Republic.<sup>110</sup> It was only as part of the 1435 alliance agreement that the emperor undertook to issue a charter to this effect, while Venice was to pay him an annual census in the form of gold cloth or other precious goods worth 1,000 fl. as a symbolic token of submission.<sup>111</sup> The final talks were conducted at the imperial court by the Venetian diplomat Marco Dandolo, who succeeded in obtaining the privilege from the aging Sigismund.<sup>112</sup> The charter, which formally constituted Doge Francesco Foscari (1423–1457) as imperial vicar, was issued on 20th July 1437 in Cheb, Bohemia.<sup>113</sup> Soon afterwards, Dandolo took the respective oath as procurator.<sup>114</sup> The flaw in the beauty of the concession was the fact that the list of granted territories did not include all the imperial regions actually controlled by Venice but formally held

108 MALLETT (1996).

109 SCHMIDT (2019).

110 For instance, in 1433 the Venetians offered Sigismund 60,000 fl. for the confirmation of their territories in the Empire and Dalmatia, or 20,000 fl. *de terris et locis imperii* only. See RTA XI, pp. 150–153, no. 74 (9th November 1433).

111 RTA XI, pp. 591–593, no. 316: *...pro honorancia et recognicione superioritatis ipsarum terrarum imperii teneatur ipsum dominium* [i.e. Venice] *et sic suis specialibus litteris se inscribet dare seu transmittere ipsi domino imperatori et successive Romanorum imperatoribus aut regibus singulo anno unam peciam panni aurati valoris ducatorum mille aut aliam rem hujus equivalencie ad libitum ipsius domini imperatoris* (31st August 1435).

112 RTA XII, pp. 171–175, no. 107 (23rd May 1437). For Dandolo, see GULLINO (1986). The originally selected ambassador, the humanist Francesco Barbaro, excused himself due to health problems. See his letters to Chancellor Schlick published in GRIGGIO (1999), vol. 2, pp. 161–162, no. 67 (7th May 1437); pp. 163–164, no. 68 (10th May 1437).

113 Two originals of the privilege are stored in ASVen, Miscellanea atti diplomatici e privati, b. 37, nos 1076 and 1076bis, edited in RTA XII, pp. 181–184, no. 113.

114 RI XI/2, p. 419, no. 12053 (20th August 1437). The doge did not ratify the oath until 20th December 1437, i.e. after Sigismund's death: RTA XII, pp. 211–214, no. 135.

by Sigismund's courtiers, whose interests the emperor did not want to sacrifice: Verona and Vicenza, claimed by the influential imperial counsellor Brunoro della Scala, the patriarchate of Aquileia, belonging to Patriarch Louis of Teck, and – as will be seen – also Bassano del Grappa.<sup>115</sup>

Naturally, Chancellor Kaspar Schlick, who had already collected bribes from Venice during the Roman campaign to influence the sovereign in accordance with the Republic of St Mark's interests,<sup>116</sup> oversaw the issuing of the charter. As for the financial aspects of the investiture, Venice's initial expectations proved naive. The senators in charge of foreign policy assumed that, according to the text of the league with Sigismund, the privilege was to be issued gratis, except for a symbolic gift of gold cloth, and that therefore only a modest chancery tax would have to be paid. According to the instructions to Dandolo, to this end no more than 2,000 fl. were to be spent, including bribes to the courtiers.<sup>117</sup> In this case, however, Schlick exceeded himself in his demands.<sup>118</sup>

As the Senate registers show, the privilege was not issued even three weeks after the date of its approval by the emperor. The Venetian ambassador was therefore to urge the release and – because the chancellor's requests seemed "excessive" – to promise a maximum of 10,000 fl. as a chancery tax.<sup>119</sup> In addition, during the negotiations over the price, Schlick brought out Sigismund's apparently forged donation charter of Bassano del Grappa, a town near Vicenza belonging to the Venetian Republic, and demanded its possession.<sup>120</sup> The astonished senators therefore ordered the ambassador Dandolo to talk the imperial chancellor out of such a claim and possibly bribe him with a lifetime annuity of 200–300 fl., on the condition that Bassano be listed in the vicariate charter.<sup>121</sup> In the end, the Venetian town did not appear among the granted territories, so Schlick must have defended his claims and refused the severance payment. Dandolo returned in October 1437, while Venetian interests continued to be represented at the imperial court by Chancellor Giovanni Imperi and, above all, by Giovan Francesco Capodilista,

115 For della Scala's claims, see LAW (1977–1978); SCHMIDT (in press); for Louis of Teck, see GIRGENSOHN-MASUTTI (2006).

116 ELBEL-ZAJIC (2012), pp. 78 and 80–81.

117 According to the instructions, the chancery tax for privileges was to be kept as low as possible, while the census was to be paid according to the wording of the league's text, i.e. a golden cloth or other item worth 1,000 fl. a year: RTA XII, p. 173, no. 107 (23rd May 1437). Subsequently, the Senate specified that the ambassador was to spend 1,000 to 1,500 or even 2,000 fl. on privileges, including bribes: *ibid.*, p. 176, no. 109 (24th June [1437]).

118 The negotiations between Schlick and Venice over the chancery tax are briefly recounted in RTA XII, pp. xl–xli; ZECHEL (1939), pp. 281–283; ELBEL-ZAJIC (2012), pp. 107–110 and 132.

119 RTA XII, pp. 190–191, no. 118: *...et pro his privilegiis et scripturis prorogationis treugarum et collationis titulorum, licet videamus factas esse vobis nomine cancellarii et cancellarie excessivas petitiones, damus vobis arbitrium promittendi et expendendi usque ad summam decem millium ducatorum vel abinde infra...* (11th August 1437).

120 For Schlick's claims to Bassano, see ELBEL-ZAJIC (2012), pp. 110–113, and ELBEL-ZAJIC (2013a), pp. 101 and 118–131. According to the authors, "the alleged donation of Bassano is a forgery from 1437 and once served as a further, this time quite personal coercive means in the negotiations with Venice over the chancery fees for the vicariate charter of the lagoon city" (*ibid.*, p. 101).

121 RTA XII, p. 191, no. 118.

currently in the papal service.<sup>122</sup>

On 1st November 1437, more than three months after the privilege was approved, the Imperial Protonotary Marquard Brisacher arrived in Venice with the charters and demanded a tax of 20,000 fl. on behalf of Schlick. The Senate refused to agree to such an excessive price and attempted through intermediaries to reduce it to 8,000.<sup>123</sup> Brisacher conceded to 15,000 fl., whereupon the senators ordered the negotiators to promise a maximum of 10,000 and to add 20 cubits of purple cloth as a bribe to the protonotary. The reasoning was as follows: "It is good to close this matter and keep Lord Kaspar in our favour [...] for cases that may arise."<sup>124</sup> From the recipient's point of view, it was again a question of striking a balance between keeping the price as low as possible and retaining the favour of the powerful imperial chancellor. In the end, Brisacher reduced the price to 10,000 fl., which the doge informed Schlick about. However, Foscari also made it clear that he would pay only out of goodwill towards him and that he expected future services and intercessions at the imperial court in return – the payment was thus seen as a *de facto* bribe.<sup>125</sup>

The negotiations were subsequently complicated by serious circumstances which had occurred in the meantime at the imperial court. On 8th December, the news reached Venice that Brunoro della Scala had died, so that nothing stood in the way of the formal investiture with Verona and Vicenza.<sup>126</sup> The Senate, therefore, immediately charged Capodilista to negotiate another vicariate privilege for these two cities, for which it was willing to pay a further 2,000–3,000 fl. to add to the total, thus amounting to 12,000–13,000 fl.<sup>127</sup> However, on the very day that the Senate decided to take this step, 9th December 1437, Emperor Sigismund died. Although this ended the hope of further concessions for the time being, the negotiations in Venice on the price of those already granted continued.

122 RTA XII, p. 200, no. 125 and note 3. For Capodilista, see TOCCI (1975).

123 ASVen, Senato, Secreti, reg. 14, fol. 69r: *Cum ad nostram presentiam venerit egregius vir Marquardus prothonotarius cancellarii [sic] serenissimi domini imperatoris et detulit investitionem nobis factam et processum contra ducem Mediolani pro parte magnifici Gasparis Slik, cancellarii imperialis, et deputatis ei auditoribus petit et requirit duc(atos) XX<sup>m</sup> et ab ea summa dicat declinare non posse.* Cf. RTA XII, p. 206, no. 130, note 4. For Brisacher, see HEINIG (1997), vol. 1, pp. 681–683.

124 ASVen, Senato, Misti, reg. 60, fol. 44r: *Et bonum sit finem ponere huic materie et tenere nobis benivolum dominum Gasparem Sglick, cancellarium eiusdem domini imperatoris, pro casibus, qui possent occurrere* (19th November 1437). On behalf of Venice, the negotiations were led by Marco Dandolo, the former ambassador to Sigismund.

125 RTA XII, p. 208, no. 132: *...ad hoc devenimus, non quia, ut est dictum, teneremur, sed ex affectione, quam ad magnificentiam vestram gerimus [i.e. towards Schlick], cupidi benivolentiam et amicitiam, quam secum habemus, nedum conservare sed de bono in melius augere, sperantes – et ita affectuose eam rogamus –, ut, quemadmodum per elapsam fecistis, sic et nunc et in futurum pro nobis apud cesaream majestatem partes vestras opportune interponere libeat et multa solita ejus cum prudentia procurare, ut ad supplicationes nostras benigne inclinetur et illas gratiose admittat* (26th November 1437). See also the letter to Capodilista *ibid.*, pp. 206–207, no. 130 (25th November 1437).

126 According to Marin Sanudo Jr., see CARACCIOLLO ARICÒ–FRISON (1999), vol. 1, p. 621 (the chronicler apparently confused Brunoro with his father Guglielmo by referring to *Vielmo dalla Scalla*). ELBEL–ZAJIC (2012), p. 109, note 187, determined the date of his death on 29th November; STRNAD (1989), p. 392, and BEINHOF (1995), p. 206, note 107, give 21st November. Given the chronology, the first possibility seems more likely.

127 RTA XII, pp. 210–211, no. 134 (9th December 1437).

The senators attempted to return to the original proposition of 10,000 fl.,<sup>128</sup> which Brisacher now refused, despite the offer of a further 1,000 fl. directly to Schlick and 200 fl. to the protonotary.<sup>129</sup> In the end, however – presumably also in view of the emperor's death, which always meant a destabilisation of the situation at the imperial court and in the chancery – he relented and released the privileges. The handover took place in January 1438. In return, Brisacher received a promissory note from the doge of Venice, who undertook to pay the chancery tax of 10,000 fl. through the Nuremberg merchant Jobst Topley to be settled in instalments of 1,000 fl. per month from the following February to November.<sup>130</sup>

The payment schedule was obviously not kept and Schlick therefore demanded the full amount as early as June 1438, but the Venetian Senate refused, citing the Republic's high costs, and promised to pay according to the original agreement.<sup>131</sup> In February 1439, in response to repeated urgings by the imperial chancellor, it was decided to pay him at least 3,000 fl. “so that, if possible, his friendship towards the Republic might be built up”, and the rest later.<sup>132</sup> Once again, then, it was mostly a matter of retaining the chancellor's favour, as is also evident from the fact that the Venetian sources fall silent until the end of the following period of 1439–1443, when Schlick was temporarily deprived of his office in the chancery.

In December 1442, Schlick arrived in Venice in person as an ambassador of King Frederick III. In response to “his cause” (*ad factum vero suum*), i.e. his financial claims against the Republic, the senators apologised for the delay in payment and decided to pay at least 1,000 fl. soon and to settle the rest of the debt later. The proposal to ask the chancellor for an additional investiture with Verona and Vicenza, as Sigismund had once promised, to give him 1,000 fl., and to make payment of the remaining sum conditional on obtaining this new privilege, was rejected – probably for tactical reasons.<sup>133</sup> In July of the following year, when a Venetian ambassador was dispatched to the royal court, the situation repeated itself: if the chancellor demanded payment of the remaining debt, the diplomat was to make an excuse citing the Republic's financial difficulties and promise

128 ASVen, Senato, Secreti, reg. 14, fol. 83v; cf. RTA XII, p. 215, no. 136, note 1 (22nd December 1437).

129 ASVen, Senato, Secreti, reg. 14, fol. 85v: *...idem Marquardus dicat non posse dare privilegia pro ipsa summa ducatorum X<sup>m</sup> ei de novo oblata et petierit licentiam et faciat pro nostro dominio non stare pro una minima re de habendo ipsa privilegia [...] ut magnificus dominus Gaspar Slik cognoscat, quod eius amicitiam caram habemus illamque non obstante morte serenissimi domini imperatoris conservare secum perpetuo intendimus, ex nunc sumus contenti ultra predictam summam ducatorum X<sup>m</sup> cancellarie ipsi domino Gaspari dare alios ducatos mille et preterea ipsi Marquardo [...] dare alios ducatos II<sup>m</sup>. Cf. RTA XII, p. 215, no. 136, note 2 (28th December 1437). Some senators pushed for an offer of up to 15,000 fl. in case an agreement with Brisacher could not be reached. See also the letter to Capodilista *ibid.*, p. 215, no. 136.*

130 RTA XII, pp. 215–216, no. 137 (15th January 1438). For Topley, see briefly SEYLER (1881), p. 66. No further details about him could be found, but he was apparently a merchant who traded with Venice and therefore acted as a liaison.

131 RTA XIII/1, pp. 148–149, no. 95 (16th May 1438).

132 ASVen, Senato, Secreti, reg. 14, fol. 184r: *...ut, si possibile sit, eius amicitia erga nostrum dominium construetur...* (19th February 1439).

133 ASVen, Senato, Secreti, reg. 15, fol. 152r; cf. RTA XII, p. 211, no. 134, note 3 (21st December 1442).

early payment.<sup>134</sup> Not even Schlick's Venetian friend, Andrea Donà/Donato, could push the matter forward without the will of the powerful Senate.<sup>135</sup>

A curious account was left by Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who in late 1446 travelled to Rome as Frederick III's diplomat and visited Venice during the mission. Along with his official tasks, he was also to bring up Kaspar Schlick's matter. In his report, the famous humanist recalls his audience with the Senate headed by Doge Francesco Foscari: "When we mentioned the chancellor and asked for payment of the debt owed to him, [the doge] smiled and said that 7,000 florins was sufficient payment for parchment and wax, and though we objected, we could not achieve anything. Such is human nature that among all peoples nothing is more difficult than to obtain money. Thus, the common saying that money is our second blood."<sup>136</sup> From this open testimony it can be inferred that the greedy Chancellor Schlick eventually recovered 7,000 fl. from the promised 10,000. In another of his works from this time, however, Piccolomini stated that the Venetians owed Schlick 4,000 fl.<sup>137</sup> The amounts given by the same author are therefore inconsistent: either the Siense humanist made a mistake, or, more likely, the chancellor in 1438 also collected the offered bribe of 1,000 fl. over and above the chancery tax.<sup>138</sup>

Kaspar Schlick died in 1449.<sup>139</sup> After his death, the unsettled claims in Venice fell by the wayside in the Schlick family. Therefore, when the chancellor's nephew Kaspar II attempted to enforce his dubious claims to Bassano del Grappa with Doge Agostino Barbarigo between 1497 and 1499, he did not mention this debt at all.<sup>140</sup> This neglect was undoubtedly because the promissory note of Doge Foscari, which had been acquired by Marquard Brisacher in Venice in 1438, had passed into the possession of his eponymous son.<sup>141</sup> Brisacher Jr. later became a prominent courtier of Maximilian I and in 1495

134 ASVen, Senato, Secreti, reg. 16, fol. 26v; cf. RTA XVII, p. 173, no. 70, note 2 (16th July 1443).

135 Donà's response to Piccolomini is edited in WOLKAN (1909), vol. 1/1, pp. 291–292, no. 122 (22nd January 1444). For this Venetian patrician and humanist, see GULLINO (1991).

136 COTTA-SCHÖNBERG (2021a), p. 86, no. 1, § 3: *Cum de cancellario fecissemus verbum suumque debitum peteremus, subrisit dixitque satis persolutum esse pergamentum ceramque septem millibus florenorum, nec replicantes aliud obtinere potuimus. Sic enim comparata est humana natura, ut apud omnes peraeque gentes nihil difficilius impetrandum sit quam pecunia. Hinc vulgo dici solet secundum sanguinem esse pecuniam* [1447]. The English translation used in the text can be found *ibid.*, p. 88. The passage is partially quoted, among others, in RTA XII, pp. 215–216, no. 137, note 3. Based on this testimony, some historians – albeit very carefully – considered the possibility that these Schlick's financial claims may have been linked to a hypothetical severance payment for Bassano del Grappa. See ZECHEL (1939), pp. 281, 283–284 and note 24 (with a critical summary of the older scholarly discussion); HEINIG (1988), p. 280; NOVOTNÝ (2015), pp. 49–50, note 135. However, in accordance with the editors of RTA XII and ELBEL-ZAJIC (2012), p. 109, it was clearly the sum owed for the chancery tax.

137 COTTA-SCHÖNBERG (2021b), pp. 201 (edition) and 202 (translation), § 64.

138 The opinion that Schlick and Brisacher accepted the Venetian bribe is expressed in RTA XII, p. xl.

139 See ELBEL-ZAJIC (2012), p. 134 and note 264.

140 Despite the support of the Holy Roman King Maximilian I, King Wladislaus of Bohemia, and the whole Empire, the initiative failed: RI XIV/2/1, p. 430, no. 6598; p. 431, no. 6603; p. 433, no. 6612; RI XIV/2/2, p. 623, no. 8074; p. 748, no. 8887; p. 765, no. 8987; RI XIV/3/1, p. 12, no. 9039; RI XIV/3/2, p. 594, no. 12850; p. 603, no. 12900; p. 682, no. 13265; p. 684, no. 13272. See also ELBEL-ZAJIC (2012), p. 113 and note 198; ELBEL-ZAJIC (2013a), pp. 122–123 and note 174; NOVOTNÝ (2015), pp. 49–50, note 135.

141 For Marquard Brisacher Jr., see HEINIG (1997), vol. 1, pp. 383–386; HÖFLECHNER (1972), pp. 32–35,

slipped this document to the king, who brought it up in conversation with Venetian ambassadors at his court and half-jokingly asked for repayment of this old debt (neither party seems to have known that 70% of it had already been settled). The Venetian diplomats did indeed have the promissory note copied and sent to Venice as an attachment to their dispatch.<sup>142</sup> As obscure references in the sources to “old matters” might suggest, Brisacher Jr.’s private negotiations with the Republic of St Mark continued in the following years.<sup>143</sup> Finally, during his stay in Venice as Maximilian’s ambassador in 1499, he was awarded an annuity of 1,000 fl. by the authority of the Council of Ten. Symptomatically enough, the annuity granted was not intended as a settlement of the old debt, but as a “bribe” for future lobbying at the royal court.<sup>144</sup>

As in the case of Milan, it can be seen how long and with what rather unsatisfactory results the negotiations over tax payment could drag on. The charters were released from the chancery about six months after they had been approved by the emperor. They were brought to Venice by the imperial protonotary, who was yet to negotiate the amount of the chancery tax with the local authorities. After difficult bargaining, the parties arrived at the sum of 10,000 fl., for which the doge of Venice issued a promissory note. This sum represented only the chancery tax while Sigismund himself renounced his fee because of the league with the Republic. In the following years, even after Schlick’s repeated urgings, he could not obtain the full amount, but only 7,000 fl.: the *Serenissima* was only willing to pay in view of the advantages at the imperial court. The unsettled debt still had a curious ending around 1500, when Marquard Brisacher Jr., who had inherited Doge Foscari’s promissory note from his father, attempted to obtain the (apparently full) amount through King Maximilian I, while in the Schlick family – in contrast to their other claims in Venice or Milan – the matter fell into obscurity.

## Conclusion

Based on the three case studies presented, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. First, the examples analysed reveal a highly variable and flexible practice of granting and paying for imperial privileges. Charters were released and only then was the tax negoti-

no. 1/18.

142 Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venezia, cod. It. VII, 799 (= 8002), fols. 77r–78r; cf. RI XIV/1/1, pp. 284–285, no. 2325 (22nd August 1495). For Venetian diplomats at Maximilian I’s court, see LUTTER (1998).

143 See the evidence quoted in LUTTER (1998), pp. 70 and 82. In 1499, Brisacher was to secretly negotiate some *cosse vecchie* with the Venetian Council of Ten.

144 LUTTER (1998), pp. 70–71 and note 248; pp. 82–83. For the respective entry in the Council of Ten’s registers, see ASVen, Consiglio dei Dieci, Misti, reg. 28, fol. 90v: *Ex rationibus bene notis huic consilio expedit in presentibus rerum et temporum conditionibus habere apud ex(celsam) maiestatem aliquam personam austeritatis, que tueatur et procuret beneficium et commodum rerum nostrarum, et propterea, cum magnificus d(ominus) Marquardus is sit, de cuius opera plurima bona expectari possunt, prout se optulit esse facturum habere modum manendi cum honore suo in curia regia et sequendi ex(celsam) maiestatem...* Cf. also SEGRE [1912–1921], vol. 1, p. 229, note 2; RI XIV/3/2, p. 808, no. 13852 (2nd December 1499), with both editors incorrectly giving the amount of the annuity as 2,000 fl.

ated, which subsequently proved difficult to collect. At other times, the charters could be placed in escrow or even pledged until the amount due was paid, to cite another case of an investiture for Duke Amedeo VIII of Savoy in 1422.<sup>145</sup> The determination of the amount appears to have been entirely arbitrary: there was no uniform fee, but rather a negotiated outcome that reflected the requirements of the imperial court/chancery on the one hand and the capabilities of the recipient on the other. In the three cases analysed, the amounts rose to thousands of florins, which was due to the high importance of the concessions.

The distribution of the fees between the sovereign and the chancery was manipulated in different ways: in the case of Mantua, Sigismund received a much higher sum, while the chancery personnel had to settle for a smaller remuneration; in the case of Milan and Venice, the monarch waived the fee because he needed the recipients as his allies, but the taxes claimed by the chancery were all the greater. It can also be doubted whether the lower chancery staff received their share. Instead, it seems that the entire tax was appropriated by the chancellor himself, on whose benevolence, after all, the payment of his subordinates depended entirely.<sup>146</sup> At the same time, the truly exceptional significance of these privileges should again be pointed out. For less prestigious charters, the recipients paid much lower fees and the whole process probably worked more smoothly, as the evidence regarding Wenceslas's and Frederick III's chanceries shows.<sup>147</sup>

On a more general level, the completely different character of pre-modern bureaucracy, which showed a significantly lower degree of institutionalisation and within which personal bonds played a much greater role, was fully revealed. In the example of the imperial chancery personnel, especially the capable but also unscrupulous Chancellor Kaspar Schlick, it has been shown how they sought to gain as much personal advantage as possible through the exercise of their office and skilfully exploited the absence of clear, binding and written rules.<sup>148</sup> In line with this *modus operandi* is the finding that the claims for taxes owed for privileges did not remain linked to the chancery as an institution, but could be claimed, even after a long delay, by the heirs of former chancery officials who may no longer have had any connection with the institution (Kaspar II Schlick, Marquard Brisacher Jr.).

From the perspective of the recipients (and therefore the debtors), a considerable reluctance to meet their financial obligations can be noted. Moreover, the duke of Milan and the Venetians worked the debts skilfully and used them as a means of coercion: they usually made excuses for their own poor economic situation, promising to settle the obligations soon, but in reality they were only willing to make payment if it would give them an advantage at the imperial court. This tendency is evidenced by the fact that the sources fall silent about Schlick's claims during the period when he was removed from the chancellorship and therefore had no value to the Italian powers. Thus, the line

145 RI XI/1, p. 357, no. 5079 (28th August 1422); p. 360, no. 5109 (3rd September 1422).

146 Cf. BRESSLAU (1889), vol. 1, pp. 411–412 and 416–417.

147 Cf. HLAVÁČEK (1970), pp. 283–289, Anhang; HEINIG–GRUND (2001), vols. 1–2.

148 Similarly, cf. HEINIG (1988), pp. 248–249.

between fees, taxes and bribes often seemed blurred. The attitude of the successors who could be confronted with the old debts decades later (Ludovico Sforza, Agostino Barbarigo) was already completely dismissive. It can be concluded that the emperor, the chancery personnel, and the recipients of the privileges were all paying back the same coin.

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## Jednání o privilegiích na císařském dvoře: listiny císaře Zikmunda pro italské příjemce a jejich finanční dimenze

Tento příspěvek se zaměřuje na finanční dimenzi vydávání privilegií římského krále a později císaře Zikmunda (1411–1437) pro italské příjemce. Po základním nastínění hospodářského fungování císařské kanceláře a mechanismů její listinné produkce v pozdním středověku autor na základě vydaných i nevydaných pramenů z bohatých italských archivů analyzuje okolnosti vydání Zikmundových významných koncesí pro tři prominentní mocnosti Apeninského poloostrova: Mantovské markrabství (1432), Milánské vévodství (1426) a Benátskou republiku (1437). Hlavní akcent jednotlivých případových studií je kladen na vyjednávání o výši poplatků pro císařskou komoru a kancelář, modalitu placení a strategie věřitelů s cílem vymoci své pohledávky, respektive dlužníků snažící se svým závazkům vyhnout.

Gianfrancesco Gonzaga z Mantovy zaplatil za listinu na povýšení do markraběcího stavu 10 000 zl. Zikmundovi a 800 zl. kanceláři. U vévodské investitury ve prospěch Filippa Marii Viscontioho z Milána a vikariátní listiny na okupovaná říšská území pro benátského dóžete se panovník vzhledem k politické situaci nároku na „úplatek“ vzdal, ale o to výše se vyšplhaly požadavky kanceláře v čele s (vice)kancléřem Kašparem Šlikem – v prvním případě šlo o 6 000 zl., ve druhém dokonce o 10 000 zl. Obě částky nicméně i přes značné úsilí věřitelů a jejich dědiců trvajících bezmála století zůstaly z části nesplaceny. Příjemci-dlužníci platby neustále odkládali a obvykle byli ochotni zaplatit pouze s vyhlídkou prospěchu na císařském dvoře. Příspěvek tak na konkrétních příkladech ukazuje flexibilitu procesu expedice císařských privilegií, význam osobní agendy kancléře a v obecné rovině také malou míru institucionalizace jakožto inherentní rys předmoderní byrokracie.



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