

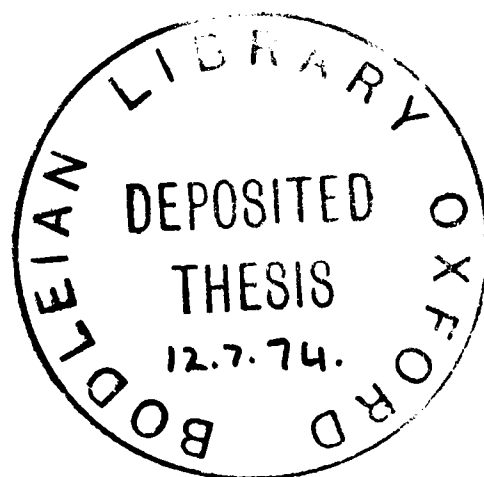
**FRANCESCO FILELFO AT THE COURT OF MILAN
(1439-1481)**

**A Contribution to the Study of
Humanism in Northern Italy**

by

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ABSTRACT

The last comprehensive biography on Francesco Filelfo was written well over one hundred and fifty years ago. Since then the general state of knowledge about this humanist has been largely conditioned by G. Voigt's hostile assessment and G. Bendaucchi's unsystematic and unreliable studies. Monographs on Filelfo's stay at Florence and Siena have been provided by G. Zippel and L. de Feo Corso, but the chief period in Filelfo's life, i.e. Filelfo at the court of Milan, has so far not been studied in adequate depth. E. Garin's recent account of Filelfo at Milan does not open up any new vistas. Yet Milan was the city where Filelfo spent half his life, where he wrote almost all his works and where he left a deep imprint in the development of humanistic culture. This thesis is therefore intended to fill this gap.

The recent publication of P.O. Kristeller's 'Iter Italicum' made it possible to base such a reappraisal on an extensive survey of Filelfo manuscripts in Italian libraries. Almost all the existing Filelfo manuscripts at Rome, Florence, Milan, Pisa, Lucca, Bergamo, Venice, Munich, Oxford, Holkham Hall and London have been examined for this thesis. All unpublished material found there had to be copied and editions had to be prepared. Only Vienna, Paris and Wolfenbüttel seem to hold still unknown works. Particularly in the archives of Florence and Milan a large amount of entirely new material has been discovered which is being edited for the first time in the appendix of this thesis. It throws a significant light on Filelfo's social and economic situation. It allows us to penetrate the curtain of rhetorical declamations of Filelfo's letters and to understand the economic and cultural reality that lay behind them. Another purpose

of this thesis consisted in the compilation of a bibliography in which all the various publications on Filelfo since about 1870 are listed, for they are scattered in periodicals and sometimes difficult to trace.

The first chapter contains a chronological narrative of the events in Filelfo's life during the years at Milan. Filelfo's ties with Milan went back to 1428. Since then he kept in close touch with a number of prominent Milanese courtiers who eventually secured Filelfo's appointment as the successor of Antonio Panormita in 1439. Filelfo accepted the invitation from Milan chiefly because there was no prospect of his being called to the papal court as long as the curia remained at Florence where Filelfo had many enemies. Filippo Maria Visconti showed his favour for Filelfo by assigning a very substantial stipend to his court poet and by making various other gifts. Under the last Visconti Filelfo rose to be the unchallenged head of Humanism in Lombardy. It was in this time that Filelfo wrote his first major works, and for the first time he conceived the idea of writing a monumental epic. The Ambrosian Republic was for Filelfo a period of uncertainty and misery. He leaned strongly to the aristocratic faction for support. He linked himself closely to Carlo Gonzaga who became one of Filelfo's most important patrons. Francesco Sforza was rather indifferent to the court poet. For reasons of prestige he renewed Filelfo's contract as court poet, but he never took any serious interest in what Filelfo was doing. Worse still were the irregularities in the payment of Filelfo's stipend. For long intervals Filelfo did not receive any money at all, so that he grew increasingly dissatisfied with his lot at Milan. The only two memorable events during this period were two journeys to Naples and Rome (1453 and 1459) which were undertaken mainly in order to

reap recognition and distinction. Filelfo's situation at court grew much worse under Galeazzo Maria Sforza. The new duke had little sympathy for the ageing humanist. He reduced Filelfo's stipend to half its previous value and put all pressure on the humanist to leave Milan. Efforts to find employment somewhere else remained abortive for three years in the 1470s. Not before 1474 was Filelfo called to Rome where he was to lecture in the 'Studio' and where he soon received a 'scriptorium'. The appointment at Rome was however not final, as Filelfo had hoped. He had to return twice to Milan and during his absence powerful groups worked at Rome against his return. Again it was a dispute over money which finally induced Filelfo to stay at Milan, once Galeazzo Maria Sforza had been assassinated. Rome had little attraction for Filelfo after the recent squabbles, whereas at Milan the death of the duke spelt the ascendancy of Filelfo's close friend Cicco Simonetta. After Lodovico il Moro had seized power in 1479 Filelfo ran again into difficulties. He looked afresh for the possibility of a transfer to Venice or Florence. He was ultimately invited by Lorenzo de' Medici and died a few weeks after his arrival at Florence.

Filelfo's financial situation is studied more closely in the second chapter. Most of the new material is concerned with Filelfo's income, so this chapter breaks mostly new ground. One must not be misled by the amount of Filelfo's nominal income, for it was rarely paid regularly. Apart from the years under Filippo Maria Visconti Filelfo received only a fraction of his stipend and for many years no money at all. In the absence of any other sources of a fixed income this was a grave situation which explains Filelfo's constant demands for subsidies from friends and outside princes. Filelfo was accustomed to a certain standard of life, and as court poet he

believed he had to represent authority also in material terms. His expenses were very substantial. A large family, dowries, an outstanding library, hospitality and presents for princes would have consumed most of Filelfo's nominal income of 600 ducats p.a. even if it had been paid regularly. The humanist was therefore constrained to resort more and more to borrowing.

The third chapter deals with the social and cultural background at Milan. It consists of a series of portraits of Filelfo's patrons, his friends and other humanists at Milan. While a few noblemen like Gaspare da Vimercato patronized Filelfo largely for conventional reasons, the real mainstay of humanism at Milan were the rising professional men like lawyers, physicians and secretaries of the ducal administration. They represented the new 'intelligentsia' which found its social and cultural identity in the new tastes of humanism. Although there were strong reminiscences of traditional 'medieval' tastes, some of Filelfo's friends were among the leading representatives of the new way of life. Cicco Simonetta, Nicodemo and Francesco Tranchadini, Niccolò Arcimboldi, Gerardo Colle, Bartolomeo Calco and Fabrizio Elfiteo deserve especially to be mentioned. The other humanists at Milan almost all either imitated Filelfo, like Giorgio Valagussa, Piattino Piatti, Mattia da Trevi or Buoaccursio da Pisa, or they fell out with him and fought against him like Pier Candido Decembrio, Porcellio, Lodrisio Crivelli and Giorgio Merula.

The fourth chapter extends the same approach to the other centres of humanistic studies with which Filelfo maintained contacts. Venice was the city to which Filelfo felt most attached next to Milan. Leonardo Giustinian and Francesco Barbaro had been his first protectors and remained his friends even after his settlement at Milan. Among the second generation of Venetian humanists Bernardo

Giustinian, Lodovico Foscarini and Niccolò Canale maintained a regular exchange of letters with Filelfo. Filelfo had left Bologna in 1439 prematurely. Nevertheless he remained in friendly correspondence with Alberto Zancario and Bornio Sala. Later Alberto Parisi became one of Filelfo's closest friends. In 1471 an attempt to find employment for Filelfo in the Bolognese university failed because Filelfo rejected the stipend offered there as completely inadequate. Filelfo's relations with Florence were almost entirely characterized by his feuds with Cosimo de' Medici, Poggio Bracciolini and Carlo Marsuppini. Filelfo's early humanistic career had been determined by his enmity with Cosimo de' Medici. Not before 1447 was Filelfo prepared to consider a reconciliation. But at that time Cosimo had lost his interest in a formal reconciliation, and thus the sentence of banishment on Filelfo remained in force. Repeated petitions addressed to Pietro and Lorenzo de' Medici later proved equally futile, although Lorenzo showed himself in all other respects a very generous patron. Even in 1481 the sentence was only suspended, not revoked. The other personalities with whom Filelfo kept up a correspondence were Donato and Angelo Acciaiuoli, Andrea Alamanni, Alamanno Rinuccini and, among the exiles, Palla Strozzi and Rinaldo degli Albizzi. With Siena Filelfo retained throughout his life friendly ties, although they grew looser towards the end of his life. Notable among his correspondents there are Agostino Dati, Francesco Patrizi and Francesco Accolti d'Arezzo. Filelfo's contacts with Mantua were almost entirely confined to the ruling family. The Gonzagas were important patrons to whom Filelfo frequently appealed for financial help. Duke Borso d'Este of Ferrara was also praised by Filelfo for his liberality. Relations with Guarino had been rather cool since 1427 and in 1455 they were practically broken off. But

there was a host of less well known humanists at Ferrara who admired Filelfo. They included Lodovico Casella, Geronimo Castelli, Lodovico Carbo and Tito Vespasiano Strozzi. Next to Florence Filelfo's relations with Rome had a deep influence on the humanist's career, but, as in the case of Florence, they were blighted by an inconsiderate invective written by Filelfo against Pius II. Up to 1458 Filelfo had always hoped to find eventually a place in the curia. Under Nicolas V, he believed, this goal had been within reach. The election of his ex-pupil Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini raised his hopes to a new pitch. When it turned out, however, that the pope's policy of retrenchment did not allow the continuation of a pension of 200 ducats, originally promised, Filelfo's disappointment burst out immediately after Pius II's death. But with an invective against the dead pope Filelfo only alienated the majority of the cardinals so that any way to Rome was again barricaded for the coming pontificate. Paul II was quite favourable to Filelfo in other respects, but only Sixtus IV finally fulfilled Filelfo's dream of working in the curia. During the two brief periods in which he stayed actually at Rome (1475 and 1476) Filelfo was soon disillusioned about life in Rome where he had many enemies. The relations with Rome ended on a note of disharmony, for in 1478 Filelfo attacked Sixtus IV for his part in the Pazzi conspiracy. Many cardinals counted Filelfo among their clients; they included Bessarion, Lodovico Trevisan, Francesco Gonzaga and Giovanni Arcimboldi. Contacts between Naples and Filelfo were established by political circumstances in 1439/1440. Inigo d'Avalos was Filelfo's chief patron in the Regno. After Filelfo's ceremonial visit in 1453 hardly any further contacts are traceable. Rimini, Cesena, Pesaro, Urbino, Montferrat and Genova were smaller centres of humanistic studies with which Filelfo maintained links.

Particularly Federigo da Montefeltre was an important patron of Filelfo in the 1470s. Filelfo's greatest contribution to the development of humanism in Italy and France lies probably in the encouragement he gave to Greek studies and Greek scholars. Especially after 1453 Filelfo was incessantly trying to help Greek refugees. Among Filelfo's Greek friends were Bessarion, Theodore Gaza, John Argyropoulus, Demetrius Calcondyla, Andronicus Callistus and Demetrius Castrenus. Filelfo had very few contacts with other European countries. Except for a comparatively short period during which he contemplated a visit to the court of Charles VII of France and consequently exchanged letters with Guillaume Jouvenel des Ursins and Thomas Coroneus, no further serious contacts with humanists abroad were ever made by Filelfo.

In the concluding chapter an attempt is made to envisage Filelfo's work and personality as a whole and to evaluate the results of this thesis in a wider context.

The second volume of this thesis contains all the footnotes, a selection of new material, largely unpublished, which concerns Filelfo's stay at Milan, and a bibliography which tries to give an up-to-date conspectus of the present state of Filelfo studies and of the available source material.

This thesis aims at breaking the deadlock from which studies on humanism at Milan have been suffering for a long time. It reassesses the principal figure of humanism in Northern Italy in the mid-15th century before the efflorescence of literature and the arts under Lodovico il Moro. It is hoped that the material listed in the bibliography may prove useful for further studies not only on Filelfo himself, but also on some other leading figures of Milanese and Venetian humanism who were deeply influenced by Filelfo. A few lines

which such research might find it profitable to pursue are suggested in the preface.

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PREFACE

Humanism in centres other than Florence or the papal curia has long been neglected. Particularly Milan and Venice appear to deserve more attention not only because they each made their own contribution to Italian Humanism, but also because they were important agencies in transmitting the interest in the new studies to Northern Europe by virtue of their geographic position. But Humanism in Northern Italy is too vast a field to be dealt with in any comprehensive and conclusive way in the limited length of a thesis. The purpose of this thesis has therefore been twofold: to provide a new assessment of the central character of Humanism in Milan in the mid-15th century, Francesco Filelfo - how badly such a work was needed will be apparent to the reader of the confused and unreliable footnotes of recent books like L. Cerioni's 'Diplomazia sforzesca' or Aulo Greco's new edition of Vespasiano degli Bisticci - and to sketch briefly the background to Humanism in Northern Italy in a series of portraits of Filelfo's correspondents and friends.

No pretence to completeness in any respect can be made under such conditions. It was impossible to examine all Filelfo manuscripts, although I have tried to be as systematic as possible in those cities in which I have worked. The purpose of the appendix and of the lists of manuscripts at the end of this thesis lies primarily in paving the way for further research. For the useful consultation of the manuscript lists it has to be explained that they are, of course, based in the first instance on P.O. Kristeller's monumental work on Renaissance manuscripts, and on other printed library catalogues available to me. With the exception of Rome, Florence, Milan, Pisa, Lucca, Bergamo, Venice, Munich, Oxford, Holkham Hall and the British

Museum the information supplied in these lists is merely an extract from these catalogues. For the cities named, however, the descriptions are my own. It will be apparent that they are much more complete and accurate than Kristeller's summary descriptions. Several mistakes have been corrected and various 'anepigrapha' have been identified. Two entirely new orations of Filelfo - i.e. not listed by A. Calderini - have come to light, one of which was delivered at Bologna on 1 December 1428 (Laur. Acquisti e doni 323, ff. 72-74v and Ricc. 1200, ff. 154-155), the other at Florence on 19 December 1429 (Bodl. Can. Class. lat. 222, ff. 79-80v). I am aware that these lists are bound to be incomplete. But they ought to prove useful for further studies on Filelfo.

For reasons of space the treatment of Filelfo's life before 1439 has been reduced to the barest minimum, although the period from 1427 until 1439 is extremely eventful and decisive for the formation of Filelfo's character. The existing accounts are far from being reliable. Also a last projected chapter on Filelfo's works, on his library, on his teaching and on his character had to be suppressed to keep the present thesis within reasonable limits.

The views of previous authors who have written on Francesco Filelfo, notably Carlo de' Rosmini, Giovanni Benaducci, Ferdinando Gabotto, Aristide Calderini and Eugenio Garin are not discussed in this thesis. Since the conclusions of my research are based exclusively on primary evidence, a discussion on why and where I disagree with these previous writers would have unduly inflated the footnotes. Some of them, notably G. Benaducci, are so unreliable that it is safest simply to ignore them.

Quotations, with the exception of Latin verse, are given in English. The original text appears in the footnotes.

It may be useful to conclude this preface with a brief summary of further fields of research where according to my knowledge a huge amount of important material is still waiting for examination. The Archives of Milan provide an inexhaustible mine of information on Milanese politics and society in the second half of the 15th century. Much can be found there on people like Nicodemo Tranchedini and his son Francesco, on Niccolò Arcimboldi, Cicco Simonetta and his family, on Gaspare da Vimercato, Carlo Gonzaga, Bartolomeo Calco, Fabrizio Elfiteo, Tommasi Tebaldi, Piattino Piatti, Porcellio and last but not least Pier Candido Decembrio; all of these personalities are deserving of more attention than they have received so far. Outside Milan there are even more people of primary importance for the development of Humanism who have almost totally escaped the interest of recent scholarship. It is hard to understand why there are no better works available on figures like Palla Strozzi, Ñigo d'Avalos, Angelo Acciaiuoli and the protagonists of Venetian Humanism like Lodovico Foscari, who is particularly interesting because of his correspondence, and Bernardo Giustinian. About the background at Rome little can be gleaned from recent works. Hardly anything at all can be found on Bartolomeo Rovarella or Gregorio Lolli for example. Finally, there are many aspects in Filelfo's own life that deserve more attention and for which there may still be undiscovered material hidden in Italian archives.

I wish to express my warmest thanks to the Rhodes Trustees, to the German Historical Institute of Rome, to Alessandro Perosa, Giuseppe Billanovich and Cecil Grayson; they have contributed greatly to making the completion of this thesis possible.

ABBREVIATIONS

The chief source for the life of Francesco Filelfo remains his correspondence. As a new critical edition of these letters is being prepared by Vito R. Giustiniani (Freiburg i. Breisgau), I have not spent much time on unravelling the complex problems posed by the correspondence as it survives. Quotations from Filelfo's letters refer therefore to the following editions, unless some manuscript source is indicated. As a rule letters are quoted by date, receiver and indication of where they can be found. A simple number in brackets refers to the 1502 edition of Filelfo's letters (*Francisci Philelfi viri grece et latine eruditissimi Epistolarum familiarium libri XXXVII*, ed. Gaspar Alamannus, printed by Giovanni and Gregorio de Gregoriis, Venice, 8 October 1502). This edition contains some errors in the foliation at the beginning of book XVII. The sequence of the pages is: f.122, f.131, f.121, ff.116-121, f.132, f.123, etc.; folios 131-152 are therefore referred to in this thesis as 131bis, 121bis, 116-121bis and 152bis. The quotation by date and addressee is the most convenient, although I am aware that a great many of the dates supplied in the 1502 edition must be wrong. In some cases the attempt has been made to correct an obviously erroneous date, on others I have confined myself to the statement that the letter needs to be redated. The forthcoming critical edition will probably solve these chronological questions.

For the other letters the following abbreviations apply:

B. - Giovanni Benaducci, Prose e poesie volgari di Francesco Filelfo, Atti e memorie della r. deputazione di storia patria per le province delle Marche 5 (1901) XLI-262.

Feo Corso - Laura de Feo Corso, Il Filelfo in Siena, Bullettino Senese di storia patria 47 (1940), 181-209, 292-316.

- L. - Cent-dix lettres grecques de François Filelfe, publiées intégralement pour la première fois d'après le Cod. Triv. 873 par Emile Legrand (Paris 1892)
- Mehus - Ambrosii Traversari generalis Camalduensium ... Epistolae, ed. Lorenzo Mehus (Firenze 1759)
- R. - Carlo de' Rosmini, Vita di Francesco Filelfo da Tolentino (Milano 1808)
- Zannoni - Francesco Filelfo, Vita di Federico d'Urbino 1422-1461, ed. Giovanni Zannoni, Atti e memorie della r. deputazione di storia patria per le province delle Marche 5 (1901), 263-420

The term 'Official collection' refers to the collection of orations which appeared in print for the first time at Milan in 1480, probably under the auspices of Filelfo himself. It has been reprinted several times without substantial changes.

The other abbreviations are:

- AM Marche - Atti e memorie della r. deputazione di storia patria per le province delle Marche
- Argelati - Filippo Argelati, Bibliotheca scriptorum Mediolanensium; praemittitur ... J.A. Saxii, Historia literario-typographica Mediolanensis (Milano 1745)
- ASF - Archivio di stato, Firenze
- ASI - Archivio storico italiano
- ASL - Archivio storico lombardo
- ASM - Archivio di stato, Milano
- ASV - Archivio segreto Vaticano
- L. Cerioni - Lydia Cerioni, La diplomazia sforzesca nella seconda metà del Quattrocento e i suoi cifrari segreti (Rome 1970, Fonti et studi del corpus membranarum italicarum VII)
- DBI - Dizionario biografico degli italiani
- GSLI - Giornale storico della letteratura italiana
- IMU - Italia medioevale ed umanistica
- MAP - Medici avanti il principato

R. - Carlo de' Rosmini, Vita di Francesco Filelfo da Tolentino (Milano 1808)

Santoro (1948) - Caterina Santoro, Gli uffici del dominio sforzesco 1450-1500 (Milano 1948)

St. d. M. - Storia di Milano della Fondazione Treccani degli Alfieri (Milano 1953-1966)

I. THE FRAMEWORK: FRANCESCO FILELFO AND THE DUKES OF MILAN

1. The Prelude to Filelfo's Arrival at Milan (1427-1439)

When Francesco Filelfo returned from Constantinople to Venice on 10 October 1427 after an absence of more than six years,¹ he ranked clearly among the most talented, most accomplished and most promising young humanists of his age. He belonged to the second generation of Italian humanists who found the path to classical studies already widely opened by the fundamental pioneering work of scholars like Coluccio Salutati, Leonardo Bruni, Guarino da Verona, Gasparino Barzizza and Uberto Decembrio. An almost vertical career had taken Filelfo from a rather obscure background in provincial Tolentino to one of the major centres of humanism in the early 15th century outside Florence: Padua.² There he had been taught by Gasparino Barzizza, Raffaele Fulgosio and Paolo da Venezia,³ among his fellow students had been many young Venetian patricians like Daniele Vetturi, Marco Lippomanno and Francesco Barbaro. At the age of eighteen he had been chosen by Gasparino Barzizza to take care of the chair of rhetoric during Barzizza's absence.⁴ Filelfo had enjoyed under Barzizza's guidance a singular training in Latin prose, he had also probably made the first tentative steps to learn Greek. His exceptional gifts, the quickness of his perception and the stylistic elegance of his Latin, attracted great attention. After a brief spell at Vicenza⁵ he was called to act as tutor for the sons of some of the most distinguished Venetian families.⁶ Owing to his successes he was given Venetian citizenship, and in order to open the road to further achievements, the two leading figures of the early Venetian humanism, Leonardo Giustinian and Francesco Barbaro, agreed to procure

him an opportunity for obtaining a thorough knowledge of Greek in the house of Manuel Chrysoloras at Constantinople.⁷ Only one Italian before Filelfo had been privileged to learn Greek in this way: Guarino had followed Manuel Chrysoloras in 1403 and had subsequently spent five years in the eastern capital.⁸

Francesco Filelfo stayed in Constantinople for about six and a half years, and when he returned, still youthful and genial, married to a beautiful Greek girl,⁹ accompanied by an immense load of books and by a reputation of having an equally perfect grasp of Latin and Greek, he was universally praised and admired in Italy. Offers were made to allure him. He himself revelled in all this attention focussing upon him, and the jubilant reception he was accorded at Bologna and Florence¹⁰ contributed much to his belief in his own effortless superiority that was to grow soon into a short-tempered, conceited self-complacency.

For the time being, however, Filelfo fixed his abode in Italy at Bologna after having been severely disappointed at Venice where a promise of some families to employ him as private tutor with a salary of 500 ducats p.a. had not been kept.¹¹ Nothing is known of any relations with the Milanese court during this period, but it seems very likely that Filelfo followed with great interest the struggle between Venice and Milan for the 'terra ferma'. Two days after Filelfo's disembarkation at Venice the decisive battle of Macclodio had been fought, after which Filippo Maria Visconti had had to seek peace through diplomatic channels. Although peace was concluded not before 18 April 1428 at Ferrara, Filelfo must have received a very deep impression of the power of Filippo Maria Visconti; he may even have come into contact with some of the Milanese envoys that came to Venice after the battle of Macclodio.

At Bologna Filelfo was certainly soon in touch with Milan. Since 1421 his old master Gasparino Barzizza was teaching at Pavia and Milan. Furthermore, Bologna always maintained close economic and political links with Milan, so that there was always a considerable number of Milanese diplomats or merchants passing through the city. Perhaps through the efforts of the papal legate Louis d'Allemand, Filelfo was introduced to the ambassador of the Visconti, Niccolò Arcimboldi,¹² to whom he remained deeply attached in friendship and gratitude until Arcimboldi's death in 1459. A few months after taking up residence in Bologna Filelfo wrote to Barzizza: 'Everything is all right here, as you can hear from your excellent sons Giovanni Agostino and Guiniforte ... I congratulate you very much on being with such a prince, in comparison with whom our age has nothing more illustrious and eminent.'¹³ This was the first and very early indication of Filelfo's admiration for Filippo Maria Visconti. We do not know the reason for this attitude. It would appear more likely that Filelfo, having been educated and patronised in Venice and having been honoured with Venetian citizenship, should have shown all his sympathies for the Venetian cause. Yet this sudden outburst of enthusiasm for a ruler who had just been forced to sign a humiliating peace treaty is not quite as unmotivated as may appear at first sight. One of the dominant forces in Filelfo's character was ambition, the desire for prestige, wealth and influence. He loved pomp, pageantry and ostentation. He knew that it was much easier for a stranger and social 'parvenu' to rise to a top position by capturing a prince's favour than in a republic like Venice or Florence where the closed ranks of the established families would hardly permit an upstart to gain a prominent place. Experience at Florence was to corroborate this calculation. Filippo Maria Visconti had shown concern

for studies and cultural life by appointing a number of eminent scholars to teach in Pavia and by building up a library in his castle at Pavia where Homer and other Greek authors could be read.¹⁴ In 1421 the humanist world had been startled by the discovery of some of Cicero's rhetorical works at Cremona.¹⁵ Filelfo had obviously received very favourable accounts from Gasparino Barzizza of what life was like at the court of the Visconti. That may explain why he carefully fostered relations with Milan while at the same time pulling all strings in order to obtain an appointment in the Florentine 'Studio'.

Because of the fragmentary evidence that is available for Filelfo's life before 1450 there is no further testimony of any connection with Milan for about four years. During this period Filelfo left Bologna and settled in Florence. In Florence the first serious quarrels with Carlo Marsuppini and Lorenzo de' Medici broke out in 1431, but they were intensified in the course of 1432.¹⁶

In an emotional letter of 21 September 1432 Filelfo complained to Niccolò Albergati¹⁷ about the troubles he was experiencing at Florence. The assassination attempt on Niccolò Uzzano had opened everybody's eyes to the rifts and tensions within the Florentine republic and its gradual drift towards open conflict. The letter closes with the remark: 'There are two places in Italy, at both of which I would desire to be not unwillingly: Milan and the Roman curia. For if I were offered a post in the service of either the pope or the famous duke Filippo Maria, I would not only not reject it but most gladly prefer it to all others and embrace such a proposal.'¹⁸ From this moment onwards relations with Milan grew increasingly close. The ultimate goal of going to Milan never left Filelfo's mind. His friend Panormita had recently been appointed court poet by Filippo Maria Visconti, and this appointment seemed to initiate a felicitous

period for humanistic studies in Lombardy, for it was followed by the arrival of Lorenzo Valla who was to leave his impression upon an entire generation of humanists in Lombardy.¹⁹ Since his stay at Bologna Filelfo had maintained a cordial exchange of letters with Panormita through whom he now hoped to further his own interests at Milan. He calculated that people who were impressed by Panormita would be overwhelmed by Filelfo. He wrote to Panormita: 'I should prefer to be in a place where, as I think, a quieter life would be offered to me than here at Florence where the entire city is full of tumults and envy.'²⁰ In the same letter Filelfo mentioned for the first time that he possessed already far-ranging connections at the Milanese court, his patrons including influential men like Guarnerio Castellione and Luigi Crotti, apart from the already mentioned Niccolò Arcimboldi. In April 1433 Filelfo's relations with Niccolò Niccoli and Carlo Marsuppini exploded in a virulent attack on both of them.²¹ After this gesture of defiance towards the supporters of the strongest faction within Florence - Cosimo himself came under a similar attack a few days later²² - Filelfo realized that his position in Florence had become extremely precarious. His plans to go either to Bologna or to Siena took definite shape. But his highest dream was still a position at Milan. Tempting offers had been made to him by the duke's ambassadors, and it was only the feeling that a change from Florence to Milan, Florence's bitter enemy, might be construed as an offence, if not as treason, by his Florentine friends, which prevented Filelfo from considering this alternative more seriously.²³

This restraint disappeared as soon as Filelfo had left Florence after the triumphant return of Cosimo de' Medici. Knowing that his position had become intolerable once his protectors of the Albizzi-faction had been banished, Filelfo took refuge in Siena.²⁴ Siena had

always been committed both geographically and traditionally to an anti-Florentine policy; in the prolonged conflict between Milan and the coalition of the two great Italian republics it tended therefore to lean towards Milan. Siena was apparently regarded by Filelfo only as a temporary stepping stone. Given the close political ties between Siena and Milan, as well as the impossibility of finding a way into the papal curia which for the time being was fixed at Florence, Filelfo threw his lot decidedly in favour of the Visconti. Through messengers and prelates travelling between Siena, Milan and the council of Basle Filelfo kept in close touch with the entourage of Filippo Maria Visconti,²⁵ through diplomatic channels he explored the political situation at Milan,²⁶ and after scarcely more than a year's residence at Siena he openly asked his friends at Milan to exert all their efforts on his behalf. The Sienese ambassador Pietro Michaele, at that time on mission in Milan, received similar instructions.²⁷ Although Filelfo was in his official letters far too cautious to express his ambitions frankly - he preferred to refer in vague terms to 'my interests' or 'the business in hand' - there can be little doubt that this sudden and vigorous initiative must be explained above all by the departure of Antonio Panormita from the Lombard capital. After five years as court poet in the service of Filippo Maria Visconti Panormita had decided to return to Southern Italy early in 1434.²⁸ This left the succession open to a contender whose talent might be comparable to that of the author of the 'Hermaphrodite'. Filelfo was obviously determined not to let this opportunity slip. He had very substantial credentials in his favour: his close friendship with Panormita showed that he had similar interests,²⁹ his poetry so far published showed that Filelfo was among the humanists of that period the one most akin to Panormita in style and taste,³⁰ Filelfo had shown unfaltering

allegiance to the duke of Milan during the critical period of the Lucchese war at Florence,³¹ and he knew he could reckon with a powerful group of patrons exerting their influence at Milan to call him into the service of the duke.³² The duke's hesitation, however, delayed the coveted invitation for over two years. Finally, on 13 July 1438 the official invitation arrived at Siena. Immediately Filelfo wrote a letter of profuse thanks, amply decked with the most fulsome flattery: not only is Alexander the Great dwarfed by the magnificence of the duke of Milan, but Filelfo even dares to say: 'As I think about you and as I consider your immortal and unheard of qualities, it appears to me that not only Alexander, celebrated in the writings and speeches of everybody, becomes plainly downgraded, but that all human memory, all ages are not worthy of being compared with you in regard to praise of excellence. When I read your letter, by God, it appeared to me that I was listening to a god ... For what could happen to me that would be more acceptable or a greater gift from heaven, than to experience your kindness or to enjoy your presence, for I worship you like some deity on earth.'³³ Now the future looked bright and promising. Yet another year was to elapse before Filelfo was actually received by his new lord. The official appointment arrived early in September of that year together with a call from Bologna. Under these circumstances Filelfo made it clear that he would accept the contract with Bologna only as a stop gap to cover the transitional period until his arrival at Milan.³⁴ He now made his decision of going to Milan public and sought to come into contact with some of the conspicuous representatives of humanistic studies in Lombardy like for example Cato Sacco.³⁵

In the meantime Filelfo transferred from Siena to Bologna where he arrived on 16 January 1439. He had promised to stay six months.³⁶

As it turned out, however, Filelfo was to remain in Bologna only for four months. Although as late as 13 April 1439 he still wrote to Giovanni Toscanella that his intentions were to stay in Bologna until the end of the current academic year in order to go to Milan in August,³⁷ there is reason to believe that at that time he was already preparing his premature departure from Bologna. Perhaps he was only looking for a convenient pretext for covering the breach of promise made to the Bolognese university. A fortnight earlier Filelfo had admitted that the duke was putting pressure on him to leave Bologna,³⁹ and although the correspondence with Antonio Pessina is ambiguous, it seems to indicate some secret intrigues that were going on with the scope of alluring Filelfo away from Bologna.⁴⁰

In his eagerness to take up as soon as possible a lucrative appointment which Filelfo regarded as the crowning achievement of his career, he may have been only too willing to cooperate in such an intrigue. We only possess Filelfo's own account of the events that led to his sudden appearance in Milan on the last day of April 1439.⁴¹ On 2 April his eldest son Gian Mario, then aged 13, had escaped. Suddenly, on 27 April, Filelfo had a dream in which he saw Gian Mario at Piacenza. Without any further inquiries and, as it appears, without consulting anybody, solely on the strength of this nocturnal vision, Filelfo took a horse and rode to Piacenza. Without much searching he ran straight into his son who was riding in the company of Florio Novati who told the story that he had just saved Gian Mario from the hands of a press gang of soldiers and that he now intended to lead Gian Mario to Antonello Arcimboldi, the brother of Niccolò Arcimboldi. Filelfo stayed with these two men the rest of the day in Piacenza. In the evening Pietro Platea, governor of Piacenza, visited Filelfo and insisted that Filelfo could not return to Bologna without having

paid a visit to the duke at Milan. All remonstrances were in vain, perhaps because they were not meant seriously in the first place.

The next morning - it was now 30 April - they set out for Milan where on 2 May 1439 Filelfo had his first audience with Filippo Maria Visconti.

This strange account leaves too many questions open to be accepted at face value. Although it was by no means an uncommon event for young boys to run away or to be kidnapped by troops,⁴² the argument that Gian Mario was missed for twenty five days, that his whereabouts were revealed to his father in a vision, that once arrived at Piacenza at about noon Filelfo did not return immediately to Bologna, all this smacks suspiciously of theatrical scenery. Particularly in the light of subsequent events this incident appears to have been extremely convenient for Filelfo. Despite several assurances that he was going to return to Bologna immediately⁴³ and lukewarm protests that he could not stay any longer in Milan without breaking his obligations at Bologna, Filelfo remained in fact at Milan. He even succeeded in conveying his family to Pavia very soon.⁴⁴

Against this interpretation full weight has to be given to the letter addressed to Toscanella on 13 April. On that day Filelfo had announced that he intended to stay in Bologna until the long vacation.⁴⁵ On the other hand the correspondence with Antonio Pessina, significantly excluded from Filelfo's official collection of his letters, lends support to the conspiracy hypothesis: on 1 April Filelfo wrote that he had explained to the duke all necessary (?) things; on 16 April he suggested spontaneously that if for the time being no place could be found for him at Milan, he could always stay at Pavia. This was precisely what happened, for until the beginning of 1440 Filelfo had to stay at Pavia.

Though it would be rash to pronounce a definite judgement on this affair, all the evidence pointing to a premeditated intrigue is supported by external circumstances. Filelfo was certainly eager to reach what he regarded as a position for life; the duke was strongly interested in securing for his court a humanist who ranked among the first in the knowledge of Greek and Latin and whose propaganda had proved its devastating effects in his venomous invectives against Cosimo de' Medici. Now the war with Venice obviously cast a shadow of doubt over the arrangement of the previous year, since it could not be excluded that Filelfo might be refused permission to leave Bologna or that he might even be tempted by Venetian offers, Therefore a fait accompli lay in the interest of all the parties concerned. Such considerations tend to undermine the probability of an alternative explanation which would argue that Filelfo simply became the victim of a diplomatic ruse. His son was abducted on purpose, information about Gian Mario's stay at Piacenza discreetly leaked to Filelfo on the calculation that once he had entered Milanese territory he would be in the power of Filippo Maria Visconti. An explanation based on these assumptions would give more credit to the letters Filelfo wrote after his arrival at Milan, for they appear to reflect a genuine surprise and a sincere desire to keep his obligations to the university of Bologna. It appears to be certain that there existed a diplomatic plot at Milan with the aim of luring Filelfo away from Bologna. Although Filelfo's own participation in this arrangement remains doubtful, most evidence suggests that, even if he knew about it, he certainly did not oppose it.

2. Filippo Maria Visconti (1439-1447)

Francesco Filelfo's decision to enter the service of the duke of Milan in order to become the court poet at the powerful but equally despotic court of the Visconti marked the most fundamental turning point in his entire life. It not only put him apart from the mainstream of what has been called 'civic humanism' by encouraging him to continue in the composition of Latin and eventually Greek poetry as against the predominantly historical and philological interests of the majority of 15th century humanists, it also determined that this poetry would be largely panegyric. When Filelfo came to Milan he was forty-one years old. Up to then he had become famous chiefly through his translations, his lectures and orations, but had he died in 1439 he would have been hardly known as in any way exceptional. All his creative works belong to a rather late stage in his life. They are inextricably bound up with his fate at Milan. Venice, Bologna, Florence and Siena represented therefore only preludes to the chief period of activity. Francesco Filelfo, as he was known to his contemporaries and as he still appears to us, is Filelfo at Milan.

It was evident right from his first arrival at Milan that Filelfo was going to be the dominant figure of humanism in Lombardy. This was certainly the position he claimed for himself, and such were the intentions of Filippo Maria Visconti when he invited Filelfo. After the brief presence of Antonio Panormita and Lorenzo Valla at Pavia during which time the university city on the Po had become a veritable focal point of studies and debates,¹ the field in Lombardy had been very much dominated by mediocrities. Pier Candido Decembrio, employed as secretary and diplomat by the duke, tried to carry forward the great work begun by his father, but a feverish activity in writing

could not really cover up his stylistic and grammatical weaknesses as well as a basically unimaginative, compilatory character.²

Guiniforte Barzizza was a good lecturer in law and a skilled administrator, but he had not inherited the rhetorical elegance and the philological acumen of his father.³ Maffeo Vegio and Antonio da Rho who both built their studies in classical antiquity upon the firm foundations of christianity had neither the desire nor the intellectual capacity for challenging Filelfo's superiority in the field of rhetoric and verse composition.⁴ This preeminence at the Milanese court found soon a very palpable expression in rewards and honours which Filelfo received from the duke and other leading figures at court.

For the first few weeks Filelfo had to take accommodation in the Cerf's inn at Milan.⁵ Filippo Maria Visconti, oversuspicious and mistrusting, evidently wanted to test the stranger before admitting him into permanent residence. An attempt to leave Milan, made by Filelfo possibly with the scope of returning to Bologna in order to fetch his family, was unsuccessful. In Piacenza he was refused permission to cross the Po so that he found himself back in Milan on 15 June 1439, a week after he had set out.⁶ Unfortunately we lose sight completely of Filelfo for four months after this incident, due to a total absence of any records. He only reappears in Pavia on 10 October 1439.⁷ Had he spent the meantime at Milan? Had he returned to Bologna to discharge his remaining obligations and to fetch his family? Had he already been staying at Pavia and was his arrival on 10 October 1439 nothing but a return from an excursion, possibly to Milan? Any attempt to answer these questions must remain guesswork. Certainly Filelfo was kept in Pavia until the duke was satisfied that Filelfo could be admitted into his presence.⁸ Twice Filelfo was

~~was~~ called to Milan to attend upon the duke, and on both occasions his enthusiastic remarks reflect an obviously close understanding between the boisterous, spontaneous, self-confident humanist and the introvert, artful, mistrusting duke. From 28 November 1439 until 8 December 1439 and again from 26/30 December 1439 until 2 January 1440 Filelfo was in Milan. On both occasions he received distinguished favours and honours.⁹ But it was not before 11 February 1440 that Filelfo could definitely settle in Milan with all his family and all his belongings.¹⁰

The expectations that had attracted Filelfo to Milan now seemed to come true. The humanist who had come from a modest provincial background had risen to a first place in Milanese society entirely by virtue of his intellectual talents. In battling against the odds of the educational disadvantages from which he suffered in comparison with young noblemen who had a considerable fortune at their disposal,¹¹ Filelfo had developed an exaggerated sense of self-assurance which frequently bordered on narcissism and aggressive arrogance. At the court of the Byzantine emperor he had tasted the sweetness of pomp and glamour as visible expressions of social rank.¹² It remained a characteristic feature throughout Filelfo's life that he loved the outward signs of power and prestige even if they were only a façade and had to hide the misery of real circumstances. For the moment, however, all his ambitions were satisfied. The duke treated him with exquisite consideration. He gave Filelfo a rank in court society which put the parvenu poet on an equal footing with the members of the Secret Council; Filelfo received a large house in Milan¹³ and was honoured with Milanese citizenship.¹⁴ All the letters and all the other works of this period reflect undisturbed happiness.¹⁵

For all his presumption Filelfo was at the same time haunted by

a paranoic suspiciousness. It is not at all an uncommon feature for the upstart to compensate inner complexes by ostentatious arrogance. The inclination to see himself as the victim of intrigues and plots increased in the case of Filelfo through his traumatic experiences at Florence and Siena where he had only narrowly escaped the daggers of assassins.¹⁶ Filelfo was worried very easily if a friend did not write as regularly as he was expected to. Such an anxiety could only be allayed by his friends by profuse and reiterated verbal reassurances of their love. Thus there was also a strong element of fear and revenge that drove Filelfo to Milan. He had declined offers from Eugenius IV, John VII of Constantinople and of Giuliano Cesarini because he feared some retaliation from the Medici-faction.¹⁷ A letter of Lapo da Castellionchio had warned him that even at Siena he would no longer be safe.¹⁸ The protection of Filippo Maria Visconti guaranteed his security¹⁹ and it also opened the last real opportunity for taking revenge on Cosimo de' Medici through a coordinated attack by Florentine exiles and Milanese troops. No sooner was Filelfo established at Milan than he took up this cause with all fervour. He had always kept in close touch with the scattered Florentine nobility,²⁰ now he worked on their behalf at court, though his claim that it was he who persuaded the duke to lend military support to the 'fuorusciti' was clearly exaggerated.²¹ Filelfo tried to give encouragement to the military leaders and challenged openly Cosimo to abdicate. He harangued the people of Florence to receive the Albizzi-faction as their rightful lords.²² The disaster of Anghiari of 29 June 1440 shattered all prospects of a glorious return to Florence. Filelfo began soon to dissociate himself from the embarrassing company of the defeated exiles.²³ He now looked for other fields where he could deploy more successfully his

talents.

Not the least among the motives that had attracted Filelfo to Milan had been the prospect of material prosperity. As early as 1433 he had been made generous offers from Milan,²⁴ and he probably knew that Antonio Panormita was drawing a salary of 400 ducats quite apart from the numerous perquisites that accrued to him in the shape of presents, invitations, etc.²⁵ Up to 1440 Filelfo had never received more than 350 ducats per annum;²⁶ the offer from Bologna to pay him 450 ducats for six months had been on all accounts exceptional. Probably Filelfo did not even receive all the money because of his premature departure.²⁷ From Pavia he wrote to one of the duke's secretaries thanking him that his salary was going to be fixed so high that he would no longer be in need of any additional sources of income.²⁸ Again, his expectations were not deceived, for on 20 June 1440 the duke decreed that Filelfo should be given a regular stipend of 500 ducats annually, backdated to 1 December 1439. This sum was to be augmented the following year by 200 ducats in consideration of Filelfo's 'distinguished services and singular erudition'.²⁹ Despite this most extraordinary remuneration Filelfo had evidently no teaching obligations, at least during the first years.³⁰

The duke's demands on his court poet were moderate. Filippo Maria Visconti never had any particular personal interest in the rapid dissemination of classical studies or in the ardent zeal for a resuscitation of a Latin literature. He preferred the Italian writers of the Trecento, French medieval romances, and when he ordered the translation of Latin authors he was looking more for anecdotes and edification than for literary elegance or historical understanding.³¹ In about 1443 he ordered Filelfo to write a commentary on Petrarch's Canzoniere, a duty which Filelfo discharged as superficially as possible

leaving the work unfinished perhaps because of the death of the duke.³² On 27 May 1445 Filelfo completed a lengthy epic for the duke in 'terza rima' on the life and the death of St John the Baptist. The poem started with the complaint that Filelfo did not really like to write poetry in the 'Volgare' as he was convinced that only Latin was a language fit to preserve poetic works for posterity.³³ Apart from these commissioned works Filelfo dedicated to the duke a translation of Plutarch's Apophthegmata³⁴ which was a work that closely corresponded to the duke's predilection for entertaining reading, and two medical works of Hippocrates. It was evident by 1445 that the duke's health was not very good. So Filelfo tried to show his concern for his lord's physical condition by dedicating these two medical treatises to him.³⁵ Eighteen months later the duke's condition had seriously deteriorated, and Filelfo made another show of his loyalty by delivering a panegyric oration on the virtues of Filippo Maria Visconti followed by a prayer to the Virgin for a long life of the duke.³⁶

Owing to the destruction of the Visconti archives at Milan and the scarcity of Filelfo's letters during this period his activities and fortunes at Milan up to 1447 remain shrouded in obscurity. The orations he pronounced on 13 September 1440 on the death of Stefano Federigo Todeschini³⁷ and on 16 November 1441 on the marriage of Francesco di Santa Rosa and Giovannina Marliano³⁸ were certainly not the only ceremonial speeches delivered by Filelfo in Milan. He was certainly much sought after by members of the upper ranks of Milanese society to lend a new dignity to their feasts. On 25 September 1446 we find Filelfo at Pavia addressing the crowds in front of the cathedral and presenting to them the new bishop Giacomo Borromeo. Again, as in the panegyric on Filippo Maria Visconti earlier in the same year, the

Latin oration was followed by a prayer in Italian.³⁹

Filelfo's relations with Pavia are not quite clear. He drew his income from the taxes destined for the 'Studio' of Pavia, yet it was explicitly stated that he had no teaching obligations and did not appear in the register of lecturers.⁴⁰ For the years 1443, 1444 and 1445, however, Filelfo's name can be found in the rolls entered among the teachers of rhetoric.⁴¹ In 1446 his stipend was suddenly transferred to Marco da Ferrara and the effect of this order was confirmed by the account of the expenses for 1447.⁴² Why the stipend should have been stopped so suddenly remains a mystery. In no case can this switch have meant that Filelfo lost his income. In such a case he would have never kept an attitude of gratitude and nostalgia for the good days of Filippo Maria Visconti as he did in later years. So there remain only two plausible explanations. As the treasurers at Pavia had occasionally delayed the payment of Filelfo's money,⁴³ it was felt that business would be speeded up if there was a resident representative of Filelfo's interests at Pavia who would pester the financial officials if they were slack. In such a case Marco da Ferrara would have been only an agent for Filelfo or for the duke; certainly he does not appear among the official teachers in the university. Alternatively, Filelfo had risen to such a favourable position as the result of the recent panegyric that the money from Pavia was stopped and Filelfo provided for in some other way; one may think of an endowment with rentable property for example.

Apart from his official commitments at Pavia, the nature and extent of which we cannot determine, Filelfo obviously carried on a large amount of private teaching. The letters to Lodrisio Crivelli and Lampugnino Birago testify that he took a keen interest in the education of the Milanese younger generation. In 1446 he recommended

one of his pupils to Novara,⁴⁴ and the 'Convivia' provide similar information.⁴⁵ They also reflect in a somewhat idealized fashion the kind of society in which Filelfo lived and felt at home: lawyers and generals employed in the ducal administration with little more than a smattering in the humanities met frequently for discussion and regularly invited Filelfo. Stirred by the universal current of humanistic studies they felt the need to broach topical questions, but for lack of a fundamental education they only dabbled in the humanistic subjects. They constantly had to consult Filelfo who, as it appears in the 'Convivia', was appreciated primarily as a living encyclopedia. In the 'Convivia' Filelfo puts into the mouths of his friends those discourses which we can expect were normally pronounced by himself. In fact, the 'Convivia' are largely a loosely connected compilation of commentaries taken almost at random from late classical lexicographers. As a corollary it is clear that this environment, that is to say the comparatively low level of the general interest in humanistic studies and the absence of any serious challenge to Filelfo's 'cultural dictatorship', profoundly shaped the character of his works during this period.

The extraordinary favours Filelfo enjoyed, combined with the continuous display of his claimed superiority, could not but provoke strong hostility among the less fortunate contenders for ducal favour. Bartolomeo Sachetti certainly voiced the feelings of numerous other Milanese when he attacked Filelfo in one of his lampoons. He bitterly denounced Filelfo's proclivity to slander and to flaunt a condescending arrogance; he taunted Filelfo with his beard which was usually worn by Greeks only and teased him with the cicatrice that scarred Filelfo's face ever since the fateful attempt of 18 May 1433.⁴⁶ But such opposition as this could hardly shake Filelfo's predominant position

in the cultural life of Milan. Humanism in Milan for several decades became almost synonymous with Filelfo for many of his contemporaries. Foreign visitors, diplomats, scholars and travellers came to pay their compliments to him,⁴⁷ his works appealed soon to a very wide audience as they were easily understandable, and in their eclectic nature very fashionable. Altogether it was a time of uninterrupted happiness for Filelfo which found expression in several poems:

Aurea tranquillis remeabunt saecula terris,
 Terra feret fruges nullo renovata ligone,
 Et quascunque velis bacas tibi poma nucesque
 Nulla culta manu per sese porriget arbor,
 Flumina lacte fluent sudabunt melle cientae.
 O utinam tantum liceat mihi ducere vitam
 Livoris vitare minas tetrumque venenum
 Effugere, illustris dum digno triumphos
 Angle tuos verus complectar carmine vates.⁴⁸

Against these exuberant expressions of gratitude some remarks to the contrary carry less weight. Filelfo obviously disliked having to write in Italian,⁴⁹ and in Milan he ran into debt as everywhere else.⁵⁰ But on the whole he was left free to do what he liked in a maximum of external security.⁵¹ Never again in his life was he to be so much at leisure and so well established. Throughout his later life the eight years under Filippo Maria Visconti remained a period remembered wistfully as an ideal example of princely patronage and munificence.⁵² The sudden death of Filippo Maria Visconti when he was only fifty-five years old struck the court poet with deep apprehension. Filelfo had firmly believed that his position under the Visconti would be a life appointment,⁵³ and he had constantly refused all sorts of offers from other parts of Italy.⁵⁴ Now he was deprived of the chief supporter of his poetical talents, and the events immediately following the duke's death augured disastrously for the future.⁵⁵

3. The Ambrosian Republic (1447-1450)

Filelfo was soon to realize what the death of Filippo Maria Visconti meant for Milan and for the former court poet in particular. The quick, almost unanimous action of the leading Milanese citizens in proclaiming a republic put it beyond all doubt that Milan was trying to break radically with the established political tradition.¹ For Filelfo the vital questions were: Would there be any room for an orator and a poet within a republic? Where was he to find patrons wealthy enough to support him? Would a republican government not allot a greater political influence to the uneducated working classes of the population, to the artisans and the lesser guilds who could hardly be expected to show much interest in Latin eloquence? Faced with these harrassing uncertainties Filelfo had no stronger wish than to see Milan as quickly as possible under the rule of a prince again. It did not so much matter who the new lord was going to be, as long as there was again a clear apex to the social pyramid, an acknowledged dispenser of patronage. In this sense Filelfo wrote to Alfonso of Naples² as well as to Frederick III.³ Indeed, after the first imperial embassy headed by Gaspar Schlick had put forward the emperor's claim to suzerainty over Lombardy, Filelfo sent two flattering satires to Vienna addressed to Frederick III and to the chancellor in order to make sure he was among their clients in the event of Milan submitting to the emperor.⁴ Within Milan Filelfo came down without hesitation on the side of the aristocratic ghibellines. As in Florence, Filelfo believed there would be no cultural or material incentives for a poet under mob rule, and in Filelfean terms whether one belonged to the despicable populace or to the cultured élite depended exclusively on one's ability and preparedness to patronize. Thus it was significant if Filelfo wrote: 'With the exception of a

few men of noble rank the masses are so incited and inflamed with this idea of a slack and dissolute liberty, that they hate nothing more than the name of Filippo Maria Visconti.'⁵

The best thing under such circumstances seemed to be to look for an escape from the threatening welter as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, all attempts made by Filelfo at going to Rome, to Siena or to Bologna met with the categorical refusal of the new city government.⁶ The second best course to take consisted in making sure that, whatever the outcome of the present crisis was going to be, Filelfo would be on the winning side. This explains why Filelfo suddenly sought to win the favour of Francesco Sforza⁷ and why the reconciliation with Medicean Florence became a matter of such urgency to Filelfo.⁸

In 1448 the situation worsened for the humanist. A republican war economy could not be expected to provide lavishly for poets or scholars. Also factions sprang up and party strife began to mar the idealistic aims of popular sovereignty.⁹ Some time during this year Filelfo must have been able to visit Genoa and Montferrat, but it is impossible to establish any motive behind such a journey.¹⁰ For the Milanese that year brought the decisive ups and downs in the fortunes of the Ambrosian Republic. After the defeats of the Venetians at Casalmaggiore (17 July 1448) and at Caravaggio (15 September 1448) the sudden volteface of Francesco Sforza, who changed sides with the treaty of Rivoltella (18 October 1448), destroyed at one stroke all the prospects of victory and peace which had appeared so near after the battle of Caravaggio. The mood of despondency at Milan is well captured in Filelfo's oration, delivered on 1 November 1448 for the newly elected governors.¹¹ The precarious situation in autumn 1448 had led to a stronger representation of military leaders and noblemen among the 'captains and defenders of liberty'. Not only

did the new aristocratic officers place the supreme command into the hands of Carlo Gonzaga, who now tried to play within the Republic the role just abandoned by Francesco Sforza, they also favoured Filelfo by inviting him to pronounce this ceremonial oration. Filelfo also addressed to them a satire full of exhortations and encouragements.¹² From that time onwards the fortunes of Francesco Filelfo and Carlo Gonzaga remained closely intertwined for well over a year.

When the term of office of this administration expired at the end of the year a violently anti-ghibelline reaction returned a radically popular government. Filelfo may have had some foreboding of such an electoral victory of the radicals when he gloomily predicted in December 1448: 'As far as I can foresee, it will not be long before the citizens driven by burning mutual hatred will fight each other mercilessly.'¹³ Such fears proved right when immediately after their coming to power the new regime had a large fraction of the aristocracy executed on a trumped-up conspiracy charge (29 January 1449). As the military and economic situation worsened for Milan, the popular government tried to bolster up morale by strict austerity measures and by hunting down alleged traitors who were of course mostly found within the ranks of the aristocracy. On 30 May 1449 about two hundred wealthy families were thus exiled and their goods confiscated. Filelfo weathered this storm by completely withdrawing from public life. Since he never possessed much wealth he was not seriously threatened, although he apparently lost some real property.¹⁴ His time came again when on 1 July 1449 the aristocratic faction succeeded in dislodging the popular government from power. At once Filelfo was called for again to celebrate this event with an oration.¹⁵ Now Filelfo had no longer to bridle his anger. He fiercely denounced the previous government, aiming his spite particularly at Giovanni

Appiano, Giovanni Ossona and Giorgio Bisulcro whom he depicted in the fashion of humanistic invectives as drunken lechers and murderous robbers. The 'triumvirate', as he contemptuously called them, came under fresh attack in a number of poems in which Filelfo vented his accumulated rage.¹⁶ A few days later the supreme command was entrusted to Carlo Gonzaga again who was enthusiastically praised by Filelfo on this occasion.¹⁷ The close association between Carlo Gonzaga and Francesco Filelfo must date from about this period, for Filelfo made an explicit reference to Gonzaga's learnedness in this speech, meaning probably Gonzaga's patronage for himself.

But the triumph of the aristocracy was only brief. Filelfo was soon to regret his having exposed himself so unreservedly on the side of the aristocracy, for on 1 September 1449 a new radical government was returned which at once liberated Appiano and Ossona from the prison into which they had been thrown two months previously. Now Filelfo could hardly reckon with any sympathy from the radicals whom he had so truculently denounced.¹⁸ Supplies in Milan now grew scarce, and rationing put all those at a definite disadvantage who were suspect of anti-republican feelings like Francesco Filelfo.¹⁹ It became clear to him that the only solution to the present chaos lay in accepting Francesco Sforza's claim to overlordship. In an open letter to Florence Filelfo had already earlier called for a reconciliation between the general and Milan,²⁰ now he directly encouraged Gaspare da Vimercato to surrender to Francesco Sforza.²¹ Filelfo's friends Niccolò Arcimboldi and Biagio Assereto also came down cautiously on the side of Francesco Sforza now.²² When on 25 February 1450 the successful coup d'état threw the gates of Milan open for Francesco Sforza, Filelfo could rightly claim that he had supported the winning side for a long time, notwithstanding the fact

that only three months previously he had gratefully acknowledged the special protection of the Venetian ambassador Leonardo Venerio who had now been killed in the turmoil. Evidently Filelfo liked to take precautions for all eventualities.

The most interesting aspect of Filelfo's reactions during the Ambrosian Republic is the close resemblance of his behaviour then and at Florence in 1432-1434. In both cases Filelfo sided with the conservative aristocratic elements against the middle classes and the demand for republican control over political power. The abuse hurled against the Milanese radicals strongly echoes Filelfo's invectives against Cosimo de' Medici. Filelfo could never quite understand how patronage would survive in a republic governed by mercantile interests. He felt more at home among land-holding noblemen who represented the traditional ideal of a cultured élite whose motivation behind patronizing artists and poets was the desire for prestige and fame. And Filelfo's notion of the poet's duty corresponded exactly to this idea in that he believed a poet had to praise his patron and to ensure his immortality.

4. Francesco Sforza (1450-1466)

The insurrection of the Milanese people on 25 February 1450, carefully prepared and guided by Gaspare da Vimercato, spelt the end of the republican experiment; the city was at the mercy of Francesco Sforza.¹ A delegation of twelve envoys, two from each gate, was soon dispatched to Francesco Sforza, the speaker of which was Francesco Filelfo. At Lodi he announced to the victorious conqueror of Milan the submission of the city and suggested the victory ought to be marked by the celebration of a triumph in imitation of classical

models.² Sforza was too shrewd a politician to accept any such proposition which would have grossly insulted the Milanese population by putting into evidence its subjugation; Sforza did not renounce, however, a ceremonial entry on 26 March 1450, a month after his first brief appearance within the walls of the conquered city. On this occasion, we can be sure, Filelfo had again a prominent part to play.³

In 1450 Filelfo was by no means a stranger to Francesco Sforza. When Tolentino had been besieged by Sforza's troops in 1438 their general had received an elegant and pompous letter of the humanist from Siena in which clemency had been extolled as the principal virtue of a general. The demand of Filelfo not to sack Tolentino had been duly studied with the invocation of classical precedents.⁴ Whether the letter had any effect upon a general whose sober realism later caught the admiration of Machiavelli we cannot tell. By the time the letter arrived in Sforza's camp Tolentino had already surrendered.⁵ Otherwise there is no reliable document about any further contacts before 1450, but since Filelfo had idolized Niccolò Piccinino in no uncertain terms⁶ it may be safely inferred that Sforza was rather cool, if not indifferent, towards the volatile talents of the loquacious humanist.⁷

The duke's first concern lay not with the 'muses' but with the pitiful political and economic situation of his newly acquired territories. As a usurper who had inherited the deep antagonism of Venice he had to be prepared any moment for an intervention,⁸ but the finances upon which military strength had to be built were totally disorganized and depleted because of the expenses incurred during the Ambrosian Republic. All administrative documents had been destroyed when the Visconti castle had been sacked in 1447. It was therefore necessary to build a new administration without being able to rely on

any continuity. Surprisingly, Sforza also kept an eye on the courtiers who thronged his antechambers in order to gain a confirmation of their position under Filippo Maria Visconti. Among these was of course first of all Francesco Filelfo.

The restoration of the monarchy, particularly the claim to legitimate succession, seemed to open the prospect of another period of bliss. On the other hand, now there was a convenient opportunity for trying what Rome had to offer.⁹ So Filelfo waited first to see how things would turn out.¹⁰ As he saw himself neglected he decided to leave,¹¹ but as he was very much influenced by emotions and momentary impressions he never made up his mind definitely which line to take, unless he sounded out the possibilities of employment somewhere else only in order to put pressure on the duke.¹² Finally, a year after the duke's accession and after much pestering, Filelfo was appointed to a professorship in rhetoric in the Milanese 'Studio' with a stipend of 600 ducats p.a. which was to be paid out of the revenue of the university of Pavia.¹³

Francesco Filelfo was not to enjoy this new position in peace. In June 1451 the first symptoms of an epidemic appeared in Milan,¹⁴ so that Filelfo no longer felt secure there. On 13 June the situation had become so serious that he turned desperately to two of his friends in the Sforzese administration. As the duke was away and had forbidden all movements of his subjects, Filelfo implored their help to escape the dilemma of disobeying the duke or risking health and life by remaining in Milan.¹⁵ At the same time he complained bitterly to Cicco Simonetta that all the promises of the duke had no effect, that he was not receiving a penny of the constituted stipend and that he was even forced to stay at Milan where his life was threatened by the plague. At the end of the letter he dropped a hint that under

such circumstances he might feel forced to seek his fortune somewhere else.¹⁶ Although for almost three months no further allusion to the plague can be found in Filelfo's correspondence, it is inconceivable that he should have resigned himself. He certainly continued to write to Cicco Simonetta, perhaps even to the duke himself, until finally on 7 September he was given the permit to leave Milan for a month in order to avoid the spreading epidemic.¹⁷ The haste with which Filelfo made use of this privilege - he set out two days later - indicates how impatient he must have been.¹⁸ On 11 September he arrived at Cremona, but, as he describes in a letter to his son Gian Mario and in one of his most felicitous poems, he was refused entry to the city gates and had to find some rather gruesome accommodation in the outskirts near the road to Mantua.¹⁹ The reason for this was that when Filelfo had left Milan one of his maid-servants had been seriously ill, so that she had to be carried on a stretcher. The entire family set out first to Pavia, but there the innkeeper sent them away. They were able to spend the night on a farm near Piacenza. At Piacenza they could allay the pedantry of a quarrelsome customs official only through the timely intervention of Filelfo's friend Sceva da Curte. The following morning they took a barge and sailed down the Po to Cremona. After disembarking they left Antonia Alipranda, the sick maid, on her stretcher near the river, while Filelfo and the others went away in search of a house to rent for the time they were going to spend in Cremona. When they finally returned to the embankment they found the stretcher surrounded by an excited crowd of people. Antonia had died and there could be no doubt that the symptoms pointed to bubonic plague. At once the fury of the assembly turned against Filelfo who had brought the danger of contagion to the walls of Cremona. He was strictly forbidden to reenter the city, he was not

allowed to touch any of his chests and parcels containing his books for fear of contamination - later one of his chief complaints about this episode was to be that he had been constrained to abandon his precious books exposed to any pilferer²⁰ - and he could regard himself as lucky that he had not been lynched on the spot. But despite the misery of external circumstances he evinced a sense of humour even in a hovel outside Cremona. Although his wants were serious enough he wrote jokingly: 'At the moment I cannot be more uncomfortable, for I am lacking everything except fleas, bugs and flies,'²¹ or on another occasion: 'Today I am going to have a philosophical meal à la Diogenes. Tomorrow, however, I am afraid I won't even have shrivelled Ceres at my table.'²² That his sardonic humour reflected truly the reality is vouchsafed by the fact that he had to rely on friends for food, since the Cremonese obviously refused to have anything to do with him for fear of infection.²³ Filelfo thanked the abbot of a nearby monastery for ten bushels of flour²⁴ and he asked Giacomo da Camerino repeatedly for some food.²⁵ At the same time he was negotiating to leave that inhospitable place. But as there was the suspicion that he had been contaminated, the health commission of Pavia was reluctant to grant permission of entry to Filelfo. Only on 29 September did he receive the letter telling him that he could now come to Pavia,²⁶ but it took him another week until he managed to leave Cremona which he covered, not quite justly, with curses and abuse.²⁷ He took the same route back. At Piacenza he stayed some days as the guest of Sceva da Curte (5-9 October 1451) who offered him lodging in one of his houses at Pavia where Filelfo arrived on 10 October.²⁸ Of his stay at Pavia we know only of a nasty squabble with Ambrogio Gentile da Dertona who was an agent of Sceva da Curte. It is not absolutely clear what happened, whether Sceva da

Curte had allowed his friend Filelfo to rent the house at Pavia at a lower rate than usual or whether Ambrogio da Dertona tried to raise the rent artificially or whether Filelfo defaulted in his payment of the stipulated rent or whether the reality corresponded to any combination of these hypotheses, all we know is that Filelfo complained to Sceva about Ambrogio on 9 November 1451 and about one of Sceva's agents on 19 December 1451, and that a year later he burst out accusing Ambrogio da Dertona - who is probably to be identified with the agent mentioned on 19 December 1451 - of having tried to chase Filelfo away from Pavia first by persuading the podestà to revoke the permit of entry and then, after the failure of this strategem, by putting pressure on the brother of Sceva da Curte to raise the rent for Filelfo to such a pitch that he would be unable to pay and thus forced to leave.²⁹ Apart from this incident Filelfo was pleased to be back in a university city where he had so many friends and where he himself had lectured some six or eight years before.³⁰ He returned to Milan not before 29 or 30 December 1451.³¹

Even though he had been away now for three and a half months Filelfo did not stay at Milan for very long. On the last day of December he travelled to Lodi in order to meet the duke.³² He certainly wanted to discuss the payment of his stipend, for regardless of the official appointment he still had not received the money he was entitled to³³ and perhaps he also wanted to deliver the oration written for Galeazzo Maria Sforza who was to go to Ferrara to meet emperor Frederick III. On 25 November of the previous year the duke had commissioned Filelfo to write such an oration,³⁴ and Galeazzo Maria was due to leave in time to meet Frederick III who was in Ferrara in May 1452.³⁵ We do not know how long Filelfo remained at Lodi. He met there, in the train of the duke, Giacomo da Camerino whom he

could now thank for the good services rendered three months ago.

On 13 January Filelfo was back in Milan.³⁶

The experience of the disastrous journey to Cremona was a lesson for Filelfo. The swearing innkeeper at Pavia, the peevish sneers of the customs officer at Piacenza and the threatening crowd at Cremona - all this rankled still in Filelfo's memory. In order to be guarded against any such incident in the future he obtained on 1 May 1452 a general passport for the entire territory of Milan in which it was stipulated that he was to be honoured as the duke's closest courtier and that food and services should always be at his disposal apart from fiscal privileges like exemption from tolls, etc.³⁷

The next opportunity to test the effect of this new passport came in November of the same year. The fresh outbreak of open hostilities between Milan and Venice in May had put Filelfo's stipend into new jeopardy. Again he decided to visit Francesco Sforza personally in order to enforce the outstanding payment. In October he had announced his intention of going to the duke's headquarters to press for the immediate satisfaction of his claims.³⁸ A month later he arrived at Calvisio where Francesco Sforza was planning his operations against Venice. The reception by the duke was cordial and warm; it aroused Filelfo's hopes that this time his demands might be met.³⁹ It took some time of bargaining, however, during which Filelfo followed the duke incessantly covering him probably with petitions, remonstrances and the whole range of a courtier's arsenal of importunate begging letters until he could exclaim triumphantly: 'I have obtained all I wanted from our most generous prince. Which is the more agreeable, since I think that I am now largely liberated from the fretful silliness of that fastidious man Longo.'⁴⁰ Antonio Longo was in fact ducal treasurer at Pavia. On 11 December we meet

Filelfo at Cremona again where he evidently took the opportunity of a barge sailing to Ferrara to pay a visit to the new duke Borso d'Este and to recover some books which the tutor of Carlo Gonzaga's children, Antonio da Verona, had taken from him two years previously.⁴¹ From Ferrara Filelfo returned just in time to celebrate Christmas at Milan.⁴²

Ever since the completion of the collection of 'Satires' in 1449 Filelfo had attempted to arrange a visit to Naples in order to dedicate this work to king Alfonso. Behind this decision there lurked in the back of Filelfo's mind probably the calculation that such an offering could command an appropriate reward. Alfonso of Naples ranked among the most distinguished patrons of humanists at that time; to be among his favourites would therefore confer a great distinction on Filelfo. Francesco Filelfo was extremely typical of his age not only in his love of ceremonial pageantry and ostentatious pomp, but even more so in his deep conviction of the superiority of the intellectual man over all other mortal beings. With the reappréciation of the great classical poets the social standing of renaissance poets changed too. They were no longer treated like medieval minstrels, that is entertainers with a knack for versification, but they regarded themselves as 'vates', that is as divinely inspired prophets. As wealthy citizens sought distinction through education in the liberal arts, those teachers who regarded themselves as the protagonists of this new culture claimed to be socially the equals of these citizens. Filelfo had chosen the career of a humanist because it offered the prospect of a steep rise in society through personal 'virtù' at a time when a premium was put on knowledge and learning. Filelfo therefore most avidly desired to reap that recognition that was due to a man who considered himself to embody the tradition of Homer and Vergil.

Behind most of Filelfo's demands this striving for 'honour' can be detected, and there is no reason to doubt Filelfo's sincerity when he remarked that all material rewards were only important to him insofar as they were palpable manifestations of this respect for his 'honour'. The overriding motive behind this journey to Naples must therefore be sought in Filelfo's eagerness to win universal recognition of his claim to be a worthy successor of that great prototype of the inspired 'vates', Homer.

For several years Filelfo had now been asking for a permit to set out on this journey, but up to 1453 the duke had persistently rejected these requests. Francesco Sforza may have feared that his foremost humanist whom he regarded politically as a valuable asset in terms of cultural prestige and propaganda might be enticed by the generosity of Alfonso to stay in Naples. It was not before February 1453 that the duke finally gave his consent to the continuous implorations of Filelfo.⁴³ A few days previously Filelfo had already warned his friends at Bologna that he would pass through their city in April.⁴⁴ But the departure was delayed for various reasons: Filelfo's creditors were not prepared to allow their debtor to leave unless he satisfied their demands first. Filelfo felt he was not well enough equipped with clothes for such an occasion as presenting a poetical work to the king of Naples. Finally, Filelfo had to scrape together a dowry for one of his daughters.⁴⁵ So in April he was still at Milan but hoping to leave on 1 May.⁴⁶ Even this date could not be kept, however. In May Filelfo was obviously trying to escape from the insistent demands of some creditors. He wrote to Niccolò Arcimboldi asking him to intervene in this affair.⁴⁷ The interposition of this senator soon smoothed the way for Filelfo, for on 21 May 1453 the duke ordered all law-suits against Francesco Filelfo and his family to be suspended

until Filelfo's return.⁴⁸ Filelfo's other needs having been supplied by the munificence of other princes like Alessandro Sforza and Lodovico Gonzaga,⁴⁹ he finally set out from Milan for what could be called a publicity tour around 1 July 1453.⁵⁰ Taking the route via the Marches he arrived at Rome on 18 July.⁵¹ Originally he had intended to continue his journey without any interruption until he arrived at Naples, but on the following morning the papal secretary Flavio Biondo came up to him to talk with him. Biondo made it clear to Filelfo that it was impossible to leave Rome without having paid a visit to the pope. But Filelfo sought to make excuses by promising to stay for a few days on his return. But when a short while later Piero da Noceto, the secretary closest to Nicolas V, repeated the same request, Filelfo could no longer refuse without giving offence. As it turned out, he remained at Rome until 25 July.⁵² Perhaps he had insisted on an immediate continuation of his journey for fear of being stopped at Rome by a representative of the duke of Milan, for in going beyond Rome Filelfo was clearly defying the duke's orders which had given him permission to go only as far as Rome. Since Milan and Naples were still at war it seemed inappropriate to Francesco Sforza for a courtier from Milan to pay a formal visit to his lord's enemy.⁵³ Filelfo, however, was determined to exploit the opportunity. Having got so far as Rome it appeared preposterous to him to return to Milan, particularly since the entire journey had been undertaken chiefly with a view to dedicating the satires to Alfonso. It can be inferred from Filelfo's letters that hints had been dropped as to the honours that were in store for him in Southern Italy. He was now fifty-five years old; other poets, like Panormita for example, had been crowned with the laurels at a much earlier age.⁵⁴ If he did not make sure he obtained this distinction now, it might elude him for ever.

Within five days he arrived at Naples.⁵⁵ The following day he went to offer his book to the king. He was given an impressive reception and treated with all the marks of distinction he desired. Soon afterwards the king moved to his country residence at Capua, and it was there that lengthy discussions, overshadowed only by the news of René d'Anjou's descent upon Italy, took place, where Filelfo was knighted on 16 August and where on 22 August the king placed the coveted laurels on the poet's head.⁵⁶

In the meantime Nicolas V had prepared all the documents for appointing Filelfo to an honorary secretariate. Upon his return to Rome⁵⁷ Filelfo was presented on 1 September with a copy of a papal bull that entitled him to all the privileges and to the ceremonial rank of a papal secretary.⁵⁸ Again he stayed almost two weeks in the Eternal City. On 11 September he continued his return, arriving after two days at Tolentino where he wanted to stay for eight days.⁵⁹ It was not sentimentalism that motivated him to revisit the streets and places of his boyhood; he more probably wanted to visit some relatives and look after the family's estates. Also the commune of Tolentino had become entangled in an interminable border-warfare with the neighbouring town of San Severino, and Filelfo's recent appointment at Rome instilled confidence that he might intervene in favour of his native town. Apart from writing to the general of the observant Franciscans about the church of St Niccolò at Tolentino⁶⁰ Filelfo addressed therefore letters to Bartolomeo Rovarella, then legate for the Marches, to Nicolas V and to Piero da Noceto explaining the causes of the war and asking for a settlement of the dispute by way of arbitration.⁶¹ Filelfo's letter to the legate had the desired effect, for on 21 September - the day of Filelfo's departure from Tolentino⁶² - the Priors of the commune wrote to the cardinal thanking

him for his promise to consider the case.⁶³

The first document attesting Filelfo's presence at Milan bears the date 9 October 1453. He cannot have arrived much before that date for the letter represents a kind of self-justification for the stay at Naples, intended to assuage any conceivable wrath the duke might have harboured against Filelfo for overstepping the terms of his passport. Such a letter must have been one of the very first things Filelfo was concerned about immediately after his return to Milan.⁶⁴ The intervening time since his departure from Tolentino had been spent on visits to various places en route as Filelfo had done in July when he had been bound for Rome. He certainly stayed at Cesena and Rimini on both occasions,⁶⁵ and from his letters it is evident that he spent some days at Bologna both in July and during the first days of October. He met there Bessarion who was papal legate in the city at that time.⁶⁶ Although there is no conclusive evidence to prove that Filelfo passed also through Mantua, the nature of his relations with the Gonzaga suggests that he did not by-pass the city on the Mincio. At any rate even with the rather apologetic letter to Francesco Sforza, Filelfo was anxious to see the duke personally in order to report on his discussions with Alfonso and to receive reassurances of the duke's favour. The duke was at that time conferring with René d'Anjou who was Milan's natural ally in any struggle with Alfonso of Naples. Filelfo felt he might provoke a hostile reaction from the French if he were to strut amongst them freshly decorated by Alfonso of Naples whom they regarded as an usurper.⁶⁷ So he picked the moment when Francesco Sforza was just leaving the French camp to meet him on the way back to Milan.⁶⁸

During the following five years (1454-1458) Filelfo settled down to a regular routine in Milan. We know of only one excursion during

this period. On 6 April 1455 he pronounced the ceremonial oration at the wedding of Beatrice d'Este and Tristano Sforza at Ferrara.⁶⁹ This oration made a deep impression at the time, although it led to an unpleasant sequel in the course of which Filelfo practically broke off all relations with Guarino.⁷⁰ To the modern reader the oration appears far from grandiose, but rather dull and incoherent. Particularly when compared with the earlier discourses on the same subject the restrictive and repetitive character of Filelfo's matrimonial orations becomes apparent. He disposed of a set of pet quotations and references, none of which showed any originality or personal inspiration. These common-places were rearranged and reformulated according to the occasion, a few exhortative and flattering words about the families of the bridal pair were fitted into the speech, and this rather stale mixture was wrapped in a resounding eloquence. In this period from 1454 to 1458 probably all the other wedding orations were written.⁷¹

The journey to Naples had boosted Filelfo's confidence so that after his return he showed new vigour and initiative in several fields. He took up translating from the Greek again, dedicating two lives of Plutarch to Malatesta Novello and Plutarch's Apophtegmata Laconica to Nicolas V; he finished the first four books of the 'Sforzias', the great panegyric epic on the new ruler of Milan; and he devoted much energy and time to teaching. Not only did he himself lecture, he also employed skilfully all his influence with the duke in order to attract outstanding teachers to Milan. Through Filelfo's recommendations the duke appointed Porcellio and Gregorio da Città di Castello, and Filelfo felt even so confident as to invite his old friend Theodore Gaza to come to Milan. If Theodore should wish to stay at the Sforzese court, Filelfo assured him, he could easily

persuade the duke to provide for some substantial stipend.⁷²

Demetrius Castrenus, another Greek, also came to Milan at about this time invited by Filelfo who finally urged successfully his appointment to the chair of Greek.⁷³

But the limelight of ceremonial orations, court ritual and public attention could not brighten up the dark shadows of Filelfo's financial plight, or, more generally, the lack of recognition which he felt sharply. The splendour of resounding Latin verse, the bland flattery of encomiastic speeches, the philosophical discussions seasoned with wit and puns had no attraction for Francesco Sforza who remained in his heart a true soldier. The duke had a keen sense for political realities, he demonstrated continuously a remarkable aptitude and a determined desire to wield power, but he remained impervious to the subtleties of a refined culture throughout his life. He took pleasure in reading military history like, for example, Livy, but it is to be doubted whether he was widely read in any literature, be it classical, Italian or French. If Filelfo wrote at a distance of eleven years after the duke's death that 'Francesco Sforza was distinguished by a great many qualities, but that he was for the rest ignorant of refined culture and poetry',⁷⁴ he was probably more sincere than ever before, when his judgement, or at least the pronouncement of his judgement, had been twisted by adulation and self-interest.

Ever since his official appointment to a chair of rhetoric at Milan Filelfo had been paid very spasmodically; on the whole the duke's resources, having never quite recovered from the turmoils of the Ambrosian Republic, were permanently depleted by the heavy demands of military expenditure in 1452 and 1453.⁷⁵ At first Filelfo had tolerated these irregularities without much fuss. He had hoped that the return of peace would also increase his position at court.

But when the peace treaty had been signed at Lodi (9 April 1454) he was to discover with growing dismay that peace did not spell regular payments nor a change in the duke's attitude towards him. Francesco Sforza remained friendly, but cool, encouraging, but hardly more than indifferent; he realized with political shrewdness that in his time patronage for the Humanists was indispensable for a prince in his position. Through patronage one did not only gain a considerable prestige in the eyes of other rulers, one also had a useful instrument for favourable publicity - a particularly important consideration for a usurper - or at least by keeping a humanist in one's own service it was ensured that he would not use his rhetorical talents against oneself. Especially Filelfo had demonstrated what he was capable of in his invectives against Cosimo de' Medici. So Francesco Sforza took a personal interest in keeping Filelfo at Milan,⁷⁶ but he never showed any interest in what his court poet was specifically doing. He did not commission him to write any work as Filippo Maria Visconti had done - the 'Sforzias' was undertaken upon Filelfo's own initiative - and it may be surmised that the duke never read the epic, the immortal poetry of which was to eternalize his name. In this respect the duke of Milan displayed perhaps more discernment than Filelfo himself who was always inebriated with the sound of his own voice. Filelfo was sensitive enough to feel the duke's lack of interest. He vented his frustration in epigrams which he soon began to collect. They formed the first steps towards a massive collection which by 1465, one year before the duke's death, had swollen to the magic number of 10,000 lines, which represented the limit Filelfo had set for himself in all his major poetical works. In two letters - not included in the official collection, of course - Filelfo grumbled that he was dissatisfied with life at Milan: 'I am in such a situation that I

desire nothing more than to move to another place and I hope to move not before long. For the nature of poetic inspiration is such that it fails if it is troubled by cares and thoughts about tomorrow. You cannot beg and sing simultaneously.'⁷⁷ Equally explicit were his words to Pietro de' Medici: 'It appears to me that I am not given here the honour that is due to me nor a reward that is adequate. The reason is that my value, or rather my potential value, is not recognized.'⁷⁸ These bitter complaints were accompanied by a large number of epigrams in which Filelfo told his plight to friends asking them to remind the duke of his obligations towards his court poet or combining a joke or an obscene remark about their lives with a demand for some subsidy. Occasionally he approached the duke himself:

Si, Francisce, meam rem neglexisse videbor,
 Num mihi, dux ingens Sphortia, des vitio?
 Qui sua non curat, qui sit censendus, ut illa
 Cordi habeat, quorum nulla sit utilitas?
 Ergo locuturo mihi si mitissimus aures
 Praestiteris faciles, officiosus eris.
 Non mea dumtaxat mihi nam sunt, Sphortia, curae,
 Sed magis illa quidem, quae tibi gesta cano.
 Usqueadeo obrueris magnarum pondere rerum,
 Esse tibi ut possint otia nulla satis.
 Inde fit, ut nostras nequeas meminisse camoenas,
 Quae bene tranquillum pectus adire solent.
 Sint maiora tibi licet et maiore tuenda
 Consilio, tamen haec digna reor studio.
 Sola quidem reddit genus immortale virorum
 Gloria, quam servat musa vel eloquium.
 Quid ferus Aeacides nec Ulysses nobile quicquam
 Usqueadeo gessit, tantus ut esset honos?
 Nam pius Aeneas quid dignum laudibus egit?
 Nempe quod in parvis maximus ipse foret?
 Qualia bisdenis potuisset navibus arva
 Vel servare sua vel petere alterius?
 Ingenium praestans et fandi copia tantam
 Prae se ferre solet vimque decusque simul,
 Ut quae parva putes, reddat permagna relatu.
 Talis Virgilius, talis Homerus erat.
 Fabula nam Troum late celebrata per orbem
 Quid nisi ficta canit? Quid nisi vana refert?
 Digni igitur vates quos dignus carmine princeps
 Diligat et gratis muneribus cumulet.

Nam si falsa valent pro veris reddere, quid si
 Vera velint veris laudibus erigere?
 Omnia praestat honos, artes iacuere relictæ,
 Quas nec honos sequitur nec fovet utilitas.
 Praemia, crede mihi, dios fecere poetas
 Et quos nutrit honos commoda et quos agunt.
 Nam qui parva suo videt emolumenta labori 79
 Atque decus positum, deficit ingenio

It is true, occasionally Filelfo wrote differently creating the impression that he was content with his role at Milan,⁸⁰ but those few positive remarks that are free of any qualifications are born out of a sudden gush of optimistic euphoria. They do not count in the face of the permanent simmering unrest, the perpetual grovelling and moans. They were short-lived responses to some particular present or favour on the part of the duke, and when the effect of such a reward had worn off - and as a rule it wore off very quickly - we encounter the same frustration as before.

Seen against this background the election of Pius II in 1458 was bound to appear to Filelfo as a gleaming ray of hope in the drab skies of Milan. Here appeared a promising opportunity of finding a new protector, more interested and hopefully also more generous than the Sforza. At once Filelfo approached the duke asking for a permit to go to Rome. He felt he had to forge the iron as long as it was hot, and the obvious strategy to oblige the new pontiff was to dedicate to him a poetical work. The system had worked with Alfonso of Naples, why should it not have the same effect now? Filelfo was probably quivering with impatience, but the ducal administration took some time over the passport. Not before 23 November 1458 was Filelfo able to announce his journey to Rome, adding somewhat in resignation: 'For we do not live at our own discretion but at that of someone else.'⁸¹ The necessary preparations for the journey required another month. On 19 December 1458 Filelfo started his second 'publicity

tour'. On the tried pattern of the arrangements made in 1453 Filelfo travelled leisurely calling on princes and friends as he went along. From 20 to 26 December he stayed at Mantua. After admiring the new castle which was being built by the Gonzaga at Revere, Filelfo was guest at Ferrara from 27 to 31 December. He then went on via Bologna, Cesena (3 January 1459) and Rimini (5-6 January 1459) to Fossombrone where he met Giacomo Piccinino who was encamped there with his troops. On 12 January 1459 Filelfo left Perugia⁸² and on the following day he entered Rome.⁸³ The timing of his arrival could have hardly been more inconvenient. Pius II was just engaged in the latest preparations for his departure in order to preside over the general assembly of European powers at Mantua. Despite the urgency of other business, however, the pope received Filelfo exceptionally kindly, showed himself affable and grateful for the visitor's offering, but less than ten days after Filelfo's arrival Pius II was being carried across Ponte Molle towards the council where he wanted to organize a new crusade.⁸⁴ No documents give any clue as to Filelfo's return to Milan. It is unlikely that he should have remained at Rome after the pope's departure on 22 January 1459. He may have joined the papal train for the first few days; a month later he was back in Milan.⁸⁵ But he was going to see Pius II again only eight months later. After the siege of Savona which had delayed his personal attendance at Mantua, Francesco Sforza appeared before the pope on 17 September 1459 bringing with him Francesco Filelfo who was to deliver a speech the following day.⁸⁶ It certainly was a great opportunity for the ducal orator. As the spokesman of the Italian ruler whose support would be decisive for the projected crusade he was to address an assembly which comprised, quite apart from the cardinals, bishops and clergymen of the curia, ambassadors of all

major Italian and of some transalpine states.⁸⁷ However, the oration which he delivered was abounding in commonplaces familiar to the reader of his letter to Charles VII of France. Filelfo simply depicted the Turks as monsters that have nothing in common with human beings save their shape, as raging barbarians with no right to live, intent only on burning and pillaging, torture and rape, ruled over by a lecherous weakling who had acquired power only as a result of fortuitous circumstances: 'Let us now finally raise our victorious banners against that barbarous, abject and servile nation of the Turks with you, O greatest pontiff, as our leader, general and standard-bearer.' The really essential question was only passingly mentioned in the last sentence. Filelfo announced that Francesco Sforza was pledging all his support to the project but that the duke himself was unable to join because of the political situation in Italy.⁸⁸ Although this oration will probably be judged by a modern reader as declamatory verbiage, bombastic and hollow in its stereotyped oversimplifications, it was applauded with tremendous approval at Mantua. The pope rose and began his answer with the words: 'It is hard and difficult to listen to the raucus pipe after the sweet sound of the lyre. For who can be compared with our most eloquent Francesco Filelfo whom we may call rightly and deservedly "The Muse of Attica"?'⁸⁹ The number of surviving copies of this speech, as well as the frequent demands from Filelfo's friends for copies, suffice to attest its popularity.⁹⁰ From Mantua Filelfo returned some time around 7/8 October 1459, thus assisting the formal opening of the council on 26 September and the signing of the declaration to collaborate and prepare the crusade (1 October).⁹¹

For the next four years little is known about Filelfo's movements. In 1460 he went to Pavia to recommend his friend Teodoro Piatti to the

faculty of law for a doctorate;⁹² a few months later he was at Como in order to speak to the citizens on behalf of their new bishop Lazzaro Scarampi.⁹³ On the whole, Filelfo travelled fairly regularly to Pavia where he had many friends and where the ducal treasury was housed. On one occasion he was unable to find any accommodation for the night and promptly castigated the innkeepers of Pavia in a Catullian epigram:

In caupones Ticinenses
 Caupones Ticini perdat deus optimus omnes,
 Qui superant omnis improbitate malos.
 Hi, Francisce, tuis contemptis, Sphortia, iussis
 Vendere nec potum nec voluere cybum.
 Ni Bottigelliade blandis hortatibus ultro
 Nos sibi iunxisset legibus hospitii,
 Nobis luna foret lecto potuque cyboque.
 Perdite caupones, o superi, Ticini.⁹⁴

Francesco Filelfo's grudge against the kind of existence he was forced to lead in Milan flared up into a devastating series of charges immediately after the death of Pius II in 1464. The pent-up indignation suddenly burst forth and shed a significant light upon what must have been going on inside Filelfo during the preceding years. One can find occasional pieces that tend to suggest a deep resentment against Francesco Sforza and the Milanese scene composed during the years 1461 to 1464, as for example:

Nullam esse fidem regibus
 Infelix ille est, aulam quicumque secutus
 Non didicit nullam regibus esse fidem.

Nihil in tyrannide duci turpe quod utilitatem affert
 Nulla fides regni, semper se fraude tyrannis
 Armat et insidiis, utile turpe nihil.

In difficilem principem
 Qui se difficilem princeps orantibus offert
 Is sibi difficilem sentiat, opto, deum. 95

What else are these epigrams but bitter complaints about Francesco Sforza, carefully cloaked in a veil of neutral anonymity, but in their

tenor so explicit that no doubt can be left as to who was the aim of this wrath. Without going into any of the details of what happened after the death of Pius II,⁶ in this context only Filelfo's judgements about Milan and the court of Francesco Sforza are relevant. In the first letter sent to Rome after news of Pius II's death had reached Milan Filelfo confessed to Lodovico Trevisan: 'I repeat, I desire and wish most urgently to change the manner of my life. For I have become wearied of this court life a long time ago, not because the prince fails to be an admirable paragon of every manliness, but because this kind of life no longer appeals to me.'⁷ A few days later Filelfo was to speak even more frankly: 'I am too much fed up with this court life, since it is equally unbefitting my age as it is completely alien to the cultivation of poetry.'⁸ The same tedium is expressed in numerous other letters of the same period.⁹⁹ Least inhibition is shown in a letter to Bessarion to whom Filelfo confided usually his innermost thoughts: 'Therefore I beseech you most insistently, liberate me once and for all from the present misery of court life. For I am constrained to say and to write frequently many things even against my will just to please the ruler and his subjects, things that are not becoming my way of life nor my philosophy.'¹⁰⁰ The objective pursued by Filelfo was evident: sick of the perpetual irregularities in the payment of his stipend, disappointed at the want of recognition at Milan, he was determined to find a better position at Rome, finally realizing thus the project that had been foiled on so many previous attempts. The duke, however, seems to have been reluctant to part with his court poet. After the flurry of the first flamboyant optimism, reflected in some compositions of 'De iocis et seriis',¹⁰¹ the high spirits were suddenly dampened and Filelfo reflected in sullen despair:

Nihil libertate iucundius, servitute autem tristius nihil
 Rursus abirevetor, dolus et fraus omnia versat,
 Nec mihi stare datur, nec licet ire procul.
 Libertate nihil iucundius, ille profecto
 Est miser, in cuius ius habet unus opem.¹⁰²

Eventually, however, Filelfo somehow succeeded in bending the duke's negative attitude. In the first days of October 1464, Filelfo assured Giacomo Ammanati-Piccolomini that the duke had no objections to his departure, and a day later Filelfo declared categorically to Ottone da Carretto that he was going to turn his back on Milan come what may.¹⁰³ By that time it was too late, however. Filelfo's frantic efforts to find some convenient employment at Rome had been baulked by his own untempered outbursts against the deceased Pius II. Through these inconsiderate invectives Filelfo had antagonized the entire Piccolomini-group within the curia without winning any substantial favour even with the cardinals of the opposing camp or of the pope himself. A controversial figure with such an irascible temper would have hardly been liked by anyone in the curia. By the end of September Filelfo's chances of being called to Rome had completely evaporated, at least for the duration of the new pontificate.¹⁰⁴ As all prospects of an invitation to Rome vanished, Filelfo was facing an awkward dilemma. He had to become more accommodating at Milan again if he did not want to risk the burning of his boats before he could be sure of some other project. So he wrote to Filippo Calandrini, cardinal of Bologna and step-brother of Nicolas V: 'In case I should have to continue my life among secular princes, I have this one Francesco Sforza whom I am inclined to consider by far superior to all other princes in all that deserves praise.'¹⁰⁵ As it turned out, Filelfo's gamble had not only barricaded solidly any way to Rome, it also cost him dearly in Milan. His immoderate hatred against the defunct pontiff alienated the powerful group of Piccolomini cardinals

to such a degree that they brought diplomatic pressure to bear upon the duke of Milan to the effect that Filelfo was detained in confinement in the castle of Milan from mid-November to 21 April 1465, and when he was released he was strictly enjoined not to write about Pius II any more.¹⁰⁶

The embarrassment created by Filelfo's scandal does not seem to have strained the relations between court poet and duke. Maybe Francesco Sforza attributed as little importance to the invectives of humanists as to their claim to hold the keys to eternal fame. Certainly Filelfo's confinement in the castle was honourable - it seems he begot a son upon one of the servants in the castle¹⁰⁷ - and there is no reason to doubt Filelfo's testimony that a week before his release he was invited to the Easter celebration at court, upon which occasion Francesco Sforza showed him special marks of favour and publicly called him 'father'.¹⁰⁸ In fact, the last year under Francesco Sforza was perhaps the happiest for Filelfo since the death of the last Visconti,¹⁰⁹ and the memory of the last favours he enjoyed before the duke's sudden death on 8 March 1466 may have contributed to the idealized picture which Filelfo retained of Francesco Sforza, particularly since such remunerations contrasted starkly with what was in store for the court poet under the next ruler.

It was a strange relationship between the parvenu humanist and the parvenu duke. In the face of all his moanings and quarrels Filelfo always entertained a deeply rooted and unfeigned admiration for the arbiter of peace in Italy. What Francesco Sforza had achieved by virtue of military prowess, Filelfo was aiming at through intellectual talent, namely a position of universally recognized superiority. Filelfo was captivated by the aura of grandeur that surrounded the duke, for it would be wrong to think of the 'Sforzias'

merely as a piece of versified adulation. Although this motive as well as vanity cannot be altogether excluded, Filelfo was also convinced that the astonishing achievements of Francesco Sforza genuinely deserved to be celebrated in an epic on the model of the Ilias and the Aeneid. Had the duke taken a greater interest in the cultural aspirations of his entourage, the course of Filelfo's activities might have taken a different turn under such a guidance. Rather than battle against an irresponsive audience and fight for his material interests, Filelfo might have been able to sustain a more elevated level of poetry. He might have been capable of developing a firmer taste for vivid imagery and apt metaphors which are sometimes displayed in his poetry which is at its best where it is most immediate and free of purpose. As it was, the duke looked upon his court poet as a useful asset in political terms, but he remained indifferent to epics, odes, epigrams or orations that were dedicated to him; it is even doubtful if he ever read the 'Sforzias'. This is why Filelfo complained to Cicco Simonetta:

Cicche, quod ignorat, nemo est, qui diligat, unde
Nullus honos musis, semper amara fames. 110

On the other hand, even when criticizing Francesco Sforza's lack of appreciation for literature, Filelfo always remembered the personal greatness and fascination that emanated from the founder of a new Milanese dynasty.¹¹¹

5. Galeazzo Maria Sforza (1466-1476)

The succession of Galeazzo Maria Sforza in March 1466 instilled again extraordinary hopes in Francesco Filelfo. Had the young prince not been reared together with his brothers and sisters under the

careful instruction of humanist teachers? Had he not previously shown signs of favour to the court poet? Was the dowager duchess not well disposed towards Filelfo? Galeazzo Maria was in his twenty-first year when his father died, and although Guiniforte Barzizza had been appointed his tutor in the 1450s, relations with Filelfo seem to have been close and cordial from the earliest years. It has already been mentioned that in 1452 Filelfo had written a speech with which the boy was to address emperor Frederick III at Ferrara.¹ In the following years the count of Pavia figures among the regular receivers of Filelfo's versified epistles, afterwards collected in 'De iocis et seriis': Galeazzo Maria donated an excellent charger to Filelfo,² the humanist reciprocated with a dog.³ After some years Filelfo pointed out discreetly that the horse had grown old, indirectly implying that he would not object to a replacement.⁴ Filelfo promised to repay his gratitude in panegyric verse, for that was all patronage was about in his eyes: the poet's task was to praise the generosity of the prince that supported him. In 'De iocis et seriis' a direct connection can be frequently detected between the demand for a gift and some subsequent encomiastic piece of poetry in honour of the donor.⁵ As recently as 1464 Filelfo had implored the young count's intercession when detained in the castle of Milan.⁶

In 1466 therefore, after the critical moment in the succession had passed owing to the firm resolution of Bianca Maria and the speedy return of her son from France, Filelfo was brimming with optimism. He wrote: 'I have nothing new to write to you about my affairs except a very sound hope of a happier lot. For I notice that I am most dear to our princes, although up to now neither I nor anybody else is being paid anything out of the treasury. Therefore everything rests on hope ...'⁷ In a similar vein he wrote to Antonio Panormita

a year after Francesco Sforza's death,⁸ the anniversary of which was celebrated by a magnificent speech of Filelfo in S. Ambrogio, probably one of the best orations Filelfo ever produced.⁹ But as time passed without any of the expected changes in his financial situation, Filelfo approached Bianca Maria asking her to remind her son of making some provisions for the court poet.¹⁰

Filelfo had always been a favourite of Bianca Maria. He had frequently approached her to exert influence over her husband. She had often sent him presents, and through her attendant Pietro Galera, a close friend of Filelfo, she was constantly kept informed about Filelfo's needs and desires.¹¹ She was probably responsible for Filelfo's appointment as tutor for Lodovico Sforza at Cremona in 1467.¹² After her death her part was to some extent taken over by Bona of Savoy who also showed more sympathy and understanding for Filelfo than her husband.¹³ Galeazzo Maria himself, however, responded even less to Filelfo's hopes than his father had done. Conceited and arrogant he showed little respect for his mother and a whimsical suspicion against the advisers of his father. Pampered by court flattery in early life he combined an impulsive, abrupt temper with a penchant for autocratic, arbitrary decisions. He despised the creatures that surrounded him at court because they were dependent on his moods, and he did not hesitate to make them feel this contempt. The well-meaning teaching of his tutor Guiniforte Barzizza had left him little enamoured with literature, rhetoric or philosophy. On the whole, his cultural patronage was very restricted. For him all this was largely a waste of money. Filelfo was to feel sorely that he, too, could not escape from the gradual decline of Milan as an active centre of cultural activities in those years. Soon the last illusions about the patronage to be expected from the new ruler were dispelled, and Filelfo had to resign himself to the

fact that the duke simply ignored him.

A premonition of the duke's high-handed disregard for his courtiers' interests was provided by a big reshuffle in the administration.¹⁴ Now the new duke seemed determined to rid his treasury also of many obligations towards 'unproductive' representatives of the arts who were little better than bare parasites in Galeazzo Maria's eyes. With indignant exasperation Filelfo protested against the summary dismissal of Fazino da Fabriano, distinguished keeper of the ducal library at Pavia, after fifteen years of devoted service to the Sforzas.¹⁵ A similar fate was to overtake himself soon enough. In October 1467 a balance had been made of Filelfo's claims and liabilities. When it became apparent that the treasury owed him over 5,000 ducats in arrears the duke must have been appalled. Negotiations were started as the result of which Filelfo had to consent to a reduction of his stipend to half its previous amount. Henceforth he was to receive only 300 ducats p.a.¹⁶ If one is to consider how insufficient an annual salary of 600 ducats had been for the style of life Filelfo believed himself entitled to, the assent to such a reduction was tantamount to unconditional surrender and self-sacrifice. Yet it appears that Filelfo was at first genuinely prepared to accept such a settlement, since he may have calculated that 300 ducats annually paid regularly was at any rate preferable to 600 ducats that remained a mirage. Considering Galeazzo Maria's character it is not altogether unlikely that he would have preferred to sack Filelfo as he had done with Fazino da Fabriano, but probably he did not dare to do so fearing that he would invite sharp criticism from other governments for not appreciating the poetical talents of his courtier and that Filelfo might find shelter with one of the powers hostile to Milan where he might unleash

a series of invectives against the ungrateful barbarian who ruled over Milan.¹⁷ By slashing Filelfo's stipend so substantially Galeazzo Maria was therefore effectively trying to goad him into resignation. If Filelfo took the initiative in asking for permission to leave, the duke could take up the role of the surprised, regretful patron and direct his ex-servant into some position where he could be sure Filelfo would not be harmful to him. Thus the real divergence between the two men was covered up by a courteous exchange of diplomatic notes, Filelfo realizing that he had become redundant and the duke noticing that his message had gone home. Filelfo was not slow in drawing the consequences from a position that had become untenable. A few days after the receipt of the notice announcing the diminution of his stipend he asked Cicco Simonetta for a permit to leave Milan.¹⁸ But for the reasons sketched above the duke proved to be unwilling to let Filelfo seek employment elsewhere.¹⁹ Even a personal visit to the duke's residence at Abbiategrasso failed to extract a licence for leaving.²⁰ Only a year later after persistent pressure on the part of Filelfo did the duke ultimately consent to grant such a permit.²¹

In other respects that intervening year afforded some respite for Filelfo. The duke's hostility was to some extent compensated for by the emergence of a number of highly educated and culturally interested personalities in the ducal administration whose support enabled Filelfo to maintain himself and his family in comparative comfort. A great occasion came with the baptism of the duke's first son Giovanni Galeazzo Maria. Born on 21 June 1469²² he was christened on 25 July 1469 in the midst of a remarkable gathering of princes. Pietro de' Medici and Federigo da Montefeltre were present to be his godfathers, and Filelfo adroitly exploited their presence to invite

them also as godfathers to the baptism of his own son, recently born by his wife Laura.²³ Filelfo enjoyed again for a brief spell being at the hub of things, receiving compliments and mixing with princes, ambassadors and cardinals.

In spring 1469 Filelfo had announced that he had to go to Siena on some business related to his family.²⁴ The project was finally realized in October. On 10 October 1469 Filelfo set out for Tuscany. Via Ferrara and Bologna²⁵ he reached Florence on 20 October. It was certainly a significant moment for the man who had had to flee from the city thirty-five years previously to revisit the places that were so inextricably bound up with reminiscences of friendship and hate, of defeat and success.²⁶ A few days later Filelfo went on to Siena, and from 27 to 29 October he stayed in Florence again on his way back.²⁷ He had more leisure now, so it took him almost a month to return to Milan. This time was spent with friends at Bologna,²⁸ Ferrara²⁹ and Cremona.³⁰ On 21 November 1469 Filelfo was back in Milan.³¹

Now the indirect pressure intimating that he was no longer 'persona grata' to the duke grew ever more intense. The following years were marked by the ups and downs of an old man's hopes and disappointments who, unwilling to believe that indeed the prospect had evaporated of spending his last years in the splendid comfort he had always expected, found it hard to reconcile himself to brutal reality. He clung to every beam of hope that indicated any possibility that decisions might still be reversed even when his own experience warned him that such hopes were doomed to be abortive. On 4 May 1470 Filelfo asked the duke to make him a present of a suit and a jacket, since he was about to leave in compliance with the duke's wishes.³² The prompt fulfilment of his desire instilled a

new optimism in Filelfo.³³ He pinned great hopes on the efforts of Alessandro Sforza who was visiting Milan in July 1470,³⁴ but the prince of Pesaro was equally unable to change his nephew's mind. Finally, in order to please the duke, Filelfo was even constrained to resume public lectures, although ever since the last years of Filippo Maria Visconti he had been exempt from this obligation.³⁵ A few days after the inaugural lecture Filelfo sent a petition to the duke obviously asking for some money, for since August 1468 he had not received a single ducat.³⁶ When this supplication had no discernible effect, Filelfo wrote a strong-worded letter to the duke himself: 'I understand clearly that my allegiance and continuous obedience are in no way acceptable to Your Highness, for, if it were otherwise, you would treat me in a different manner than you are actually doing. I realized, I have to take some other employment which I will do gladly in order to unburden you of such an intolerable expenditure. But, may it please you, as you are a worthy prince, to fulfil your duty towards me, that is to pay me as much as you once promised through your letter and then confirmed orally several times in the presence of many witnesses, namely 300 ducats each year until the end of my life.'³⁷ When the duke proved to be impervious even to such language, Filelfo decided the time had come to take definite steps to get away from Milan.

The first approaches were made to Borso d'Este who had always been the most generous ruler and most favourably disposed towards Filelfo. But negotiations were tragically interrupted by the unexpected death of the newly created duke of Ferrara which left the succession to his brother Ercole d'Este who had different tastes and showed little enthusiasm for inviting Filelfo to his court.³⁸

Simultaneously Filelfo had approached the ducal secretary Cicco

Simonetta to help him find some honorable position.³⁹ It must have been extremely painful and disillusioning for a humanist upon whom invitations had been showered in his heyday to discover that he now was more in the role of a begging dotard. In the end, a contract with Bologna also fell through.⁴⁰

Amidst these dull prospects the news of the death of Paul II and of the election of Sixtus IV (26 July 1471/9 August 1471) opened an entirely new vista. Did the opportunity of going to Rome not return now? At once Filelfo plunged once more into the deceptive seas of vain hopes and empty promises, buoyed up by the confidence he put into the declarations of Pietro Riario, soon to be cardinal of S. Pietro in Vincoli and all-powerful product of an over-indulgent papal nepotism; indeed it was rumoured that he was the illegitimate child of the vicar of Christ himself.⁴¹ After a while the promises from Rome proved elusive. In December 1471 Filelfo hoped that he would be able to take up his work at the curia in the immediate future,⁴² whereas in fact he had to wait another three years before his dream was realized. For despite the repeated reassurances that the pope was trying to find a place for Filelfo, powerful interests were at work in Rome to keep Filelfo out of the curia, and so the official bull never arrived at Milan. Throughout the following year the issue was kept in abeyance; Filelfo wrote several letters to Lorenzo de' Medici in which he announced his departure as 'imminent', but in every case his anticipations came to nought.⁴³ Finally in April Filelfo was on the point of giving up. As a last expedient he offered himself to Lorenzo de' Medici as a professor in the new 'Studio' at Pisa, but here, too, he was rebuffed.⁴⁴

In the meantime, as long as he remained at Milan, Filelfo was dependent on the duke's favour. For the sake of some financial

subsidy he was now prepared to go to all lengths, to foot-licking, flattery and abject self-humiliation. A single friendly word from the lips of the tyrant was received with profuse thanks,⁴⁵ although to friends outside Milan Filelfo hardly minced his words about his frustration.⁴⁶ The utmost the duke would do for him was to intervene on his behalf in some dispute between the humanist and the Secret Council⁴⁷ and to protect Filelfo against the increasingly importunate demands of his creditors.⁴⁸ But even the reprieve afforded by this ducal letter could not save Filelfo from falling into a state of bankruptcy in which he was no longer able to pay interest on his loans, let alone redeem his pawned property. In a letter to the duke that is moving in its candour we catch a glimpse of Filelfo's predicament: 'But take into account that I have no other possession in this world except my intellect and my knowledge, nor have I anything left to pawn away. Furthermore, I have called upon all the friends I have to support me. I have nothing now to maintain me with fourteen mouths to feed. Furthermore, Gasparino da Casale says he intends to sell my books and garments and belongings, if I cannot find soon some expedient.'⁴⁹ To his friend Francesco Accolti d'Arezzo, Filelfo complained that he was 'rolling the stone like Sisyphus'.⁵⁰

What appeared to be very much like a stalemate by 1473 was suddenly broken when Pietro Riario visited Milan in September 1473. Filelfo must have exploited the cardinal's presence to elicit from him a new definite pledge of securing an appointment at Rome.⁵¹ The sharp condemnation of Pietro Riario in a letter to Lodovico Foscari, however, and Filelfo's sarcastic remarks about his sudden death in 1474 indicate that the irresponsible cardinal had once more recklessly promised what he had no intention of carrying out.⁵² Yet this episode set things moving again. Together with the nomination

of a series of pro-Milanese cardinals⁵³ ultimately Filelfo's protectors at the curia won the upper hand over the strong resistance of some anti-Milanese secretaries and cardinals. After a brief spell in which Filelfo seems to have seriously attempted to resume negotiations with Venice,⁵⁴ and after several outbursts of despair,⁵⁵ in October 1474 the way had suddenly been cleared for him to come to Rome.⁵⁶ Within a month the necessary preparations were made and on 21 November 1474 at the age of over 76 Filelfo started his journey to Rome.⁵⁷ From 25 until 27 November he stayed at Mantua.⁵⁸ At Florence he made a break for three days early in December;⁵⁹ before Christmas he presented himself to the pope with an elaborate oration.⁶⁰

Filelfo's venture at Rome was ill-starred from the very beginning. When he arrived in 1474 it was only on the understanding that he would soon revert to Milan in order to fetch his family. So after only seven months of residence at Rome he set out again on 18 June 1475 for Milan.⁶¹ At Florence he saw the procession in honour of the city's patron S. John Baptist,⁶² on 6 July 1475 he reached Milan,⁶³ whence he went straight to Pavia to report to the duke about his experiences in Rome.⁶⁴ Although there was basically nothing wrong with his absence from Rome, yet when instead of resuming his duties in September, as he had promised, he had not reappeared by the end of the year, the faction at Rome which had never liked his presence there was substantially reinforced. The reason for Filelfo's unexpected delay was to be found in the death of two of his sons and in a serious illness of his wife whose health had always been precarious ever since the complicated birth of Celestino, the last legitimate child of Filelfo which had died on 4 May 1474 a few days after being born.⁶⁵ Until the end of October Filelfo had still hoped she might recover sufficiently to endure the journey to Rome, but as

her state became more dangerous, he had to realize that he was facing the excruciating dilemma of either abandoning his wife to the care of his friends or of renouncing his position at Rome which was jeopardized with each day he stayed away.

The duke had shown himself this time more affable than before. Now that he could rest assured that Filelfo was no longer taxing the revenues of his territories he had no objection to the humanist who supplied him with some useful information about the diplomatic events at Rome.⁶⁶ Filelfo reciprocated the duke's friendliness by composing a sonnet and a canzone for Galeazzo Maria's mistress.⁶⁷

On 11 October 1475 Filelfo again received a passport,⁶⁸ but his departure was postponed until early December.⁶⁹ Before leaving he had promised his wife to return as soon as she had been restored to health. Passing through Modena, Bologna, Florence - where he spent Christmas⁷⁰ - and Siena he arrived back in Rome on 4 January 1476.⁷¹ With an elegant speech he excused himself for the delay in his return protesting that he had never waived in his faith and devotion to the pope.⁷² The day after his arrival the level of the Tiber began to rise and for ten days Rome suffered from one of the worst floods of that century. Filelfo gave a vivid picture of how one could go by boat as far as S. Maria sopra Minerva.⁷³ But, more important, bad news came from Milan. His wife was rapidly getting worse so that Filelfo, when he learnt that no hope of her recovery was left, decided immediately to join her as soon as possible. He announced that he would hasten back to Milan on 24 April 1476, since he could not possibly leave Rome earlier.⁷⁴ On 24 March he was sent a passport from Milan,⁷⁵ and on the eve of his departure he estimated it would not take him longer than two months until he would be back in Rome.⁷⁶ But again circumstances worked against him in a truly

frightening combination. Before his departure some cases of a fatal disease had been discovered in Rome which showed clearly the symptoms of the plague. Filelfo feared the worst. On the eve of his departure he posted a letter to Ambrogio Grifo playing down the importance of these deaths and demanding insistingly not to be put under quarantine because three whores and four German drunkards had died.⁷⁷ But when he reached Mantua on 11 May 1476, after short breaks in his journey at Urbino and Rimini,⁷⁸ he learnt much to his dismay that a rigorous quarantine had been imposed by the duke of Milan on everybody arriving from regions regarded as infected by the plague.⁷⁹ At the same time the physical condition of his wife was now steadily deteriorating. He implored his powerful friend Cicco Simonetta to grant him an exemption from the quarantine, but Cicco could do no more than recommend the case for speedy consideration to the Health Commission, which in view of the fact that forty days had elapsed since Filelfo's departure from Rome recommended his admission to Milan.⁸⁰ Five days later, on 6 June 1476, Filelfo entered the city, but it was too late for meeting his wife: Laura Magnolina had died two days previously and had been interred at once.⁸¹ Filelfo received a severe shock. The premature death of his still youthful wife accentuated his feeling that he was getting too old. He was outliving his age.⁸² For the moment there was little Filelfo could do. He reported again to the duke about his journey,⁸³ and after arranging the necessary provisions for the few children that had survived so far, he kept his gaze fixed on Rome where he still intended to return as soon as the epidemic raging there had abated.⁸⁴ During the entire summer the papal curia had been residing outside Rome because of the plague so that Filelfo felt justified in not returning until Sixtus IV himself had returned to Rome.⁸⁵ When he

received the news, however, that the pope had resumed his residence in the Vatican in October, the desire to join the curia as quickly as possible gave way to a sceptical attitude of wait and see.⁸⁶ There certainly existed within the curia a powerful group of people who did not wish Filelfo's reappearance. They cast ridicule on the senile humanist who had spent only a total of ten months in Rome since his appointment two years before. What was the use of paying someone who did not discharge the duties he was expected to do? Filelfo for his part wanted to ensure that these people were not going to get the better of him and that the conditions of his employment in Rome would be the same as two years previously.⁸⁷ The blizzards and rainfalls of the winter afforded a convenient pretext for not returning to Rome for the time being;⁸⁸ it is odd to read such an argument, because the year before Filelfo had travelled in December without any particular inconvenience.

At the same time he was putting forward some feelers as to whether he could not remain in Milan after all, although on 1 November he had complained to Leonardo Grifo, papal secretary at Rome: 'Since a more benignant air has returned to Rome, I, too, have to go back now ... For after the loss of my wife and children what pleasures can be offered to me here?'⁸⁹

In the midst of these uncertainties as to whether he should return to Rome or stay in Milan the assassination of Galeazzo Maria Sforza on 26 December 1476 while he was attending mass at S. Stefano exploded like a bombshell. It brought all Filelfo's calculations to nought and opened new prospects which he was not slow in seizing.⁹⁰ In a way he may have felt relieved by the murder of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, for now sovereignty lay nominally with a small boy of seven years in whose name power was wielded by Bona of Savoy and Cicco

Simonetta who were both much more favourably disposed towards Filelfo than the deceased duke about whom Filelfo was to write only two months after his assassination a condemning judgement that echoed in its formulation the charges levelled against dead Pius II: 'For Galeazzo Maria, son of Francesco Sforza, declared war upon all learned men, in a manner of speaking, as well as on himself.'⁹¹

6. The Last Years (1477-1481)

The danger of an upheaval may have loomed for some days after the tyrannicide, but it quickly receded as Bona of Savoy and Cicco Simonetta took a firm stance for the legitimate successor. Filelfo was delighted: he admonished Cicco Simonetta to govern impartially by not favouring any faction,¹ and he offered his services as court poet and tutor of the young prince to the duchess.² Although at first the Roman project was still further pursued, Filelfo's interest in a return to Rome waned as Milan offered new attractions.³ By April 1477 the decision had been made and Filelfo was firmly committed to Milan again.⁴

Evidence for the last years of Filelfo's life is extremely scanty. The correspondence breaks off in 1477, no works can be attributed to this period and archival material ceases to be as plentiful as under the first two Sforzas. All that can be conjectured is that he was given a fixed albeit modest income, that he continued to appear as the chief public orator on ceremonial occasions⁵ and that he stoutly supported the duchess and Cicco Simonetta against any threats from the sons of Francesco Sforza who sought to grab power for themselves. Filelfo's explicit letter to Lodovico Sforza in which he extolled Lycurgus for having preserved the unborn son of

his brother Lunomus and for having handed over the government to this boy later left no doubt as to the message under the given circumstances.⁶ Filelfo's commitment to Bona and Cicco Simonetta may explain why he wrote so pressingly to Lorenzo de' Medici after the successful seizure of power by Lodovico Sforza on 8 September 1479.⁷ Filelfo felt that his position had become threatened, for his oldest protector Simonetta had been decapitated and the new ruler suspected him of supporting Bona and the legitimate heir. The dedication of the first printed edition of orations to Lodovico il Moro may be interpreted as an attempt to win the confidence of the ex-pupil.⁸ But by then Filelfo had already accepted the invitation of Lorenzo de' Medici to lecture at Florence.⁹ Towards the end of June 1481 he left Milan, but the efforts of the journey proved too much for the octogenarian. Filelfo arrived at Florence a sick man and died within a month.¹⁰ Compared with the attention he had received during his earlier days, little notice was taken of his death. He had outlived his age, people were already forgetting him. Lorenzo de' Medici assigned a place for his burial in S. Maria dei Servi, but we do not even know the site of Filelfo's grave.

II. FILELFO'S FINANCIAL SITUATION

Ever since the exhaustive study of G. Voigt on the 'Rebirth of Classical Antiquity' Filelfo has been characterized as an avaricious court poet whose venality induced him to barter his verse against payment to anybody, haggling with almost all princes of Northern Italy for garments, horses, monetary gifts, dowries, etc.¹ E. Garin maintains that Filelfo, devoid of any higher aspirations, reduced everything to a market in which he constantly tried to sell himself to the highest bidder.² Nobody, however, has so far taken the trouble to examine such judgements in the light of first-hand evidence which is so abundantly supplied by the Milanese Archives.

Filelfo was descended from an otherwise unknown family of Tolentino.³ Through his mother he was related to the Florentine Bucelli-family.⁴ After the death of his parents he and his brother Niccolò inherited the family estates at Tolentino in 1456. But although Filelfo insisted on his legal claims to this inheritance, he renounced the exploitation of his new possessions leaving the revenues of the patrimony entirely to his brother.⁵ After the death of this brother in 1465 Filelfo appointed three trustees for his possessions at Tolentino, but Giovanni di Cola, a cousin of Filelfo, was still to enjoy the usufruct of all the lands until such time as some of Filelfo's children should inherit them.⁶ Filelfo never drew a steady income from landed property, and there is no evidence that he ever invested his money in some real estate in Lombardy. If he had done so under Filippo Maria Visconti, that property had certainly been confiscated by the Ambrosian Republic. Unlike most of the other humanists Filelfo had consequently no income in his own right.⁷

When Filelfo landed in Venice in 1427 he had been promised by some noble patricians a salary of 500 ducats for teaching young Venetian noblemen.⁸ Because of the plague the project never materialized and Filelfo was left without any income for the time being. At Bologna his stipend amounted to 450 ducats, of which 150 ducats was a personal gift from the cardinal legate Louis d'Allemand.⁹ It is doubtful if Filelfo was paid regularly after the upheaval in autumn 1428. At Florence he was satisfied with a stipend of 225 florins for the first three years,¹⁰ but this stipend was increased to 350 florins in 1431.¹¹ Towards the end of his stay in the Arno city, Filelfo claimed to have received 450 florins from the Albizzi-faction which clearly favoured their loyal humanist.¹² At Siena Filelfo was back on a salary of 350 florins p.a.¹³ Later, when he accepted the invitation from Bologna, the offer made to the famous humanist was 450 florins for six months. This was a salary never dreamt of by anybody before that time, so that Filelfo proudly flaunted this singular honour in his letters.¹⁴ But whether he actually received the entire sum remains doubtful in view of his premature departure which meant that he had only stayed in Bologna for less than four months.

At Milan it took some time for his stipend to be decided upon; from his temporary accommodations at Pavia Filelfo acknowledged gratefully that the duke was considering a stipend fixed highly enough so as to make Filelfo independent of all other sources of income. But, Filelfo insisted, whatever its amount, such an entitlement had to be paid regularly.¹⁵ Filelfo's allowance, to be paid out of the revenues of the university of Pavia, was assessed first at 500 ducats per annum, but it was soon increased to 700 ducats.¹⁶ Apart from a minor incident in 1444 there were only few other irregularities in

the payment of this grant.¹⁷ Certainly the wistful memories of the munificence of the last Visconti on Filelfo's part indicates that he was satisfied during those seven years, for beyond his regular allowance he received perquisites like a diamond ring and a large house.¹⁸

To form an idea of the value of this salary it may be useful to compare it with other salaries of that time. The payrolls of Pavia and Florence universities show that the average salary for a professor of rhetoric rarely exceeded 300 florins p.a.; sometimes a less well-known teacher had to live on as little as 50 florins p.a. Cato Sacco, the leading law professor at Pavia, reached an income of 500 florins only towards the end of his life. Cicco Simonetta, the private secretary of Francesco Sforza, drew 600 ducats later in the 1450s. The revenues of a cardinal would be roughly in the region between 5,000 and 10,000 ducats per annum. A regular income of 700 ducats, supplemented by occasional gifts, was therefore a very sizeable amount of money which afforded a life in comfort and abundance.

It seems that 1440-1447 were those years during which Filelfo was very well off, so that he may have conceivably invested some of his money. If he did, he lost all in the welter of the Ambrosian Republic. There is a passage in his poetry that appears to refer to property confiscated during the Republic.¹⁹ But it may simply have been the possessions of his second wife Orsina Osnaga which he did not succeed in retaining for himself after her death.²⁰

At any rate Filelfo was totally dependent on whatever stipend the new duke would be prepared to offer, when Francesco Sforza entered Milan in 1450. By that time there was absolutely no other source of money available to the court poet. Filelfo's concern over

this insecure financial position is mirrored by the mounting flood of letters which he showered upon various influential people at court between October 1450 and February 1451 pressing for some fixed income or some other material security in order to sustain himself and his family at Milan.²¹ On 17 February 1451 he wrote to Cicco Simonetta explaining the situation: 'I still do not know how to eke out a living unless I know clearly what annual revenue will be assigned to me. For to ask for money under these conditions is highly annoying also to me. Furthermore, you are aware that a year has passed since our excellent prince took over this city. What and how much I have you know, I have no landed property nor private savings. I always used to have just so much as the princes in their munificence and prudence thought I was worth. I have a large family. And since I never learnt to be avaricious, like the populace is, I am suffering from extreme shortage of money. Those shares of the booty which I was given as an award by the Milanese Republic, valued at 2,000 ducats, I had to return to their former owners because of the constitutional change. Beyond this the public treasury owed me 600 pieces of gold and more ...',²²

On 2 April 1451 Filelfo's petitions were answered in that the duke conferred upon him a chair of rhetoric, poetry and philosophy which was endowed with an emolument of 600 ducats p.a.²³ Theoretically, the halcyon days of Filippo Maria Visconti should now have returned. Reality, however, was far from conforming with the ducal fiat. Because of the chronic disorder of the public finances and as a result of almost permanent warfare for more than four years, the money required for such an endowment could not be found. All liquid assets were devoured by military expenditure. It is therefore not a surprise to learn that Filelfo was not a penny better off after April 1451

than before. Until the end of May he still pursued a project of returning to Siena, which had been initiated in February, provided he could get there 700 ducats.²⁴ From June 1451 up to the end of the year there is a chain of documents concerning Filelfo's stipend, but nothing stirred apparently.²⁵ During the first days of 1452 Filelfo therefore visited the duke personally at Lodi, he obtained a very sharp letter from Cicco in which the treasurers were reproached for their slackness in paying Filelfo adequately.²⁶ This letter, however, proved to be just as worthless a piece of paper as the previous ones.²⁷ In the course of 1452 Filelfo grew so exasperated that he almost exchanged blows with the treasurers.²⁸ In November 1452 he visited the duke again, and this time he insisted on some tangible assurance which he obviously obtained.²⁹

For some time money ceased to be the primary concern of Filelfo and in a time of tranquillity and comfort he wrote most of his lyrical poetry and the first four books of the 'Sforzias'. But the deceptive security was not to last. Even when his salary was paid fairly regularly Filelfo never understood how to spend thriftily, how to make provisions for future eventualities or how to calculate his long-term needs. When he got an advance payment, he spent it at once and found himself later short of cash.³⁰ To his intimate friend Tommasi Tebaldi he complained that 600 ducats were not sufficient for his needs.³¹ Filelfo had the concept that a poet had to entertain lavishly, that a 'vates' had to appear in public with visible symbols of his exalted rank. That is why he spent large sums on silk gowns and horses, on luxury articles of all kinds, on books and scribes. In his eyes these expenses were necessary for a poet of his rank. His hour had come, he thought, when in 1459 he was buoyed up by the crest of popularity at Mantua. Less than two months later he dictated

to Francesco Sforza the conditions under which he would be prepared to stay at Milan, implying evidently that he had now so many other protectors that it was his turn to call the tune. The list of eleven demands which he submitted to the duke makes an astonishing reading. Even if due consideration is given to irregularities in the payment to Filelfo, one is struck at first sight by the unabated effrontery with which Filelfo demands to be made a member of the Secret Council - with all the privileges and no duties - to be given an immediate payment of a lump sum of 2,000 ducats, to have some lucrative posts in the ducal administration conferred upon some relatives and to be enfeoffed with landed property that would yield, no expenses counted, some 200 ducats annually.³² The offensive character of this document is greatly diminished, however, if one considers that as from the beginning of 1460 all payments by the ducal treasury to courtiers were going to be suspended owing to the enormous strain on the Milanese finances arising from Francesco Sforza's military commitments in Southern Italy and in Genova.³³ It is just conceivable that Filelfo, who had good contacts in the administration, had heard about this imminent measure and hastily tried to commute his salary into some more secure form of income that would not be affected by any such retrenchment. If the petition appears clumsy and impudent, this only corroborates the view that Filelfo was basically hopelessly inexperienced and naïve in financial matters. That all court pensions were in fact suspended for over seven years is attested by various remarks in Filelfo's letters and by a balance sheet, drawn up in October 1467, which shows that Filelfo had not received any stipend from 1460 onwards and that he had had to maintain himself in the meantime by borrowing.³⁴

The succession of Galeazzo Maria Sforza first instilled vain

hopes in Filelfo. Early in 1467, a year after the duke's accession and some weeks after Filelfo had celebrated the memory of Francesco Sforza in his 'Oratio parentalis', he approached the dowager duchess about his pay.³⁵ On his birthday, 25 July 1467, he adjured both Cicco Simonetta and the duke to make some provisions for their court poet.³⁶ The result was an urgent request by the duke to his treasurers to pay without any delay what was due to Filelfo,³⁷ and this order probably led to the compilation of the balance sheet. It appears that before the end of the year the bulk of Filelfo's creditors were satisfied so that any payment made by the duke in 1467 was first consumed to settle outstanding debts. The question of a continuation of a regular payment remained to be settled for the future. It took a long time to decide the income to be assigned to Filelfo after 1467. The court poet grew increasingly impatient and bitter as deliberations dragged on without any results. Disappointed and enraged he wrote to Ambrogio Grifo: 'I do not know whether the prince wants to make provisions for me, for he may fear to make a financial loss, if I died before I could have earned my wages.'³⁸ Finally he was told that his stipend would be halved.³⁹ Since permission to leave was permanently refused, what else could Filelfo do but acquiesce in something he had not the power to change?

But the formal promise of a new, regular stipend, albeit reduced to half its former value, was as ineffective in reality as the first promise by Francesco Sforza made in 1451: Galeazzo Maria Sforza loathed what he regarded as empty chatter of a senile humanist. If he spent money on cultural interests at all, it was exclusively on musical performers and singers. Filelfo received the first instalment of his new salary, i.e. 100 ducats for ^{four} ~~three~~ months to cover the period from August until the end of the year,⁴⁰ but after that the

treasury defaulted again, probably encouraged to do so by the duke himself. Throughout the summer of 1469 Filelfo complained that his second 'terzaria' was not being paid.⁴¹ For the following five years Filelfo continued to be left without any income. He scrupulously computed the sums he was entitled to, and from time to time he tried to remind the duke of his obligations.⁴² All this, however, was apparently of no avail. The offer, finally made by Sixtus IV in 1474, to pay Filelfo 600 ducats per annum and to confer upon him the first scriptorium that fell vacant, must have come as a much desired redemption from long years of begging and humiliation.⁴³ No sooner did the duke know that Filelfo was definitely to leave Milan than he turned to being much more generous to the poet. In May 1474 he gave new orders that Filelfo ought to be paid - whether they had any effect or not is unknown⁴⁴ - and before Filelfo left he gave him 100 ducats. The grateful acknowledgement of this gift was at once dexterously combined with the demand for a new garment by Filelfo.⁴⁵ Similarly in July 1475, after the first brief stay at Rome, Filelfo received a gift of 100 ducats from the duke,⁴⁶ probably in order to cover the expenses of moving his household to Rome. After having returned from his second journey to Rome, Filelfo approached the duke once more to help him with a subsidy for the winter.⁴⁷ Whether this last request had any success we cannot tell. Less than two months later the duke was dead.

The favourable situation after the duke's assassination seemed to promise happier days for Filelfo. Late in January or some time in February 1477 he approached Bona of Savoy to submit his pay claims to her. He demanded the full stipend of 600 ducats originally promised by Francesco Sforza, for, so he alleged, he could not live on less. Furthermore he demanded a credit of 1,000 ducats to redeem

his pawned property, repayable over ten years at a rate of 100 ducats a year, so that he would be left with a net income of 500 ducats. In the mouth of an almost octogenarian the demand for such a long-term credit no doubt sounded strange.⁴⁸ For the last years no precise information about Filelfo's finances is available apart from a negligible payment from Savoy for his letter to Filiberto.⁴⁹ It is very unlikely that his requests to Bona of Savoy were fully granted. Milan was in a rather unstable political position after the duke's assassination, and military expenses must have been considerable. When Lodovico il Moro gained control over the administration in 1479, he was clearly not too well disposed towards a man who had been one of Cicco Simonetta's closest friends and who had openly admonished the successful usurper not to seek power.⁵⁰ Both Sassi and Giovio report that in 1481 Filelfo died in the utmost poverty.⁵¹ One may also discover financial worries behind Filelfo's growing impatience in seeking a more lucrative employment elsewhere, be it at Florence or Venice.⁵² Most probably Filelfo lived again largely on loans and gifts. The only valuable possession he left at his death was his books. Originally Filelfo had destined his library for his favourite son Frederico Francesco,⁵³ but after the death of the young boy in 1475 the clause in Filelfo's testament came into effect according to which Filelfo's library was to be left to the chapter of the Milanese cathedral.⁵⁴ Those books that were still at Milan when Filelfo died went to the cathedral library, whereas those books taken by Filelfo to Florence - and these were the most valuable ones - ended up in the Laurenziana; Lorenzo de' Medici probably regarded them as his own property since they had formed the securities for so many loans advanced to their deceased owner.

It is essential to bear in mind what Filelfo himself once

expressed: 'I have nothing in this world except my talent and my learning.'⁵⁵ In the absence of any considerable property or other forms of fixed revenue that might have allowed a degree of independence Filelfo had to sell himself. He was forced to look for patrons, sponsors and maecenases in order to live. Fundamentally Filelfo was rather naïve in financial matters. Coming from a rural, provincial background, he viewed with deep mistrust the new money economy, the rise of bankers, the political power of wealth and the careful processes of bookkeeping. He continued to warn against wealth throughout his life, contending that money corrupted and virtue and wealth were mutually exclusive.⁵⁶ He himself loved to spend without caring for tomorrow. He was sincere in his assertions that he did not care for money. A high salary was a mark of honour, that is why he insisted on it. But he was never greedy. If he had much money he spent it at once; if he had none, he managed to survive with little.⁵⁷ He did not want to be rich, but he strongly desired to have sufficient resources for the entertainment of friends and visitors and for the outward demonstration of the social rank he claimed for himself. His ideal was the old chivalrous court society, presided over by a lavish, generous prince who looked after his courtiers' interests giving them money whenever they needed some. Munificence and patronage were in Filelfo's eyes the cardinal virtues of a prince.⁵⁸ He did not understand that there were other more urgent needs to be met at a time of rapidly rising government expenditure. He praised the good old days of earlier princes and condemned the careful reckoning economic mentality of the rulers of the second half of the fifteenth century.⁵⁹ To do Filelfo justice it must be emphasized that he practised the virtues he preached. He lent out money freely to friends or people in need,⁶⁰ he spent a fortune on books and presents for

friends and patrons. When he was given a silver stick as a reward for his 'Consolatio' he offered it spontaneously to the duke on the following day without any hesitation.⁶¹

As a result of this brief analysis of Filelfo's income, we may conclude that during the thirty years of his residence at Milan under the Sforzas only for a period of at most five years (1454-1459) did Filelfo have something like a regular income. For the rest of the time he was either paid nothing at all or only a negligible fraction of his entitlement.

We have to turn now to a brief sketch of Filelfo's expenses which will be followed by a discussion of the additional sources of income with which he made up for the discrepancy between pay and spending. Filelfo had twenty-four children, most of whom died before him.⁶³ His first wife, Theodora Chrysolora,⁶⁴ left him two sons and two daughters;⁶⁵ by his second wife, Orsina Osnaga,⁶⁶ Filelfo had three daughters and one son who died eight months after being born.⁶⁷ Laura Magnolina, Filelfo's third wife,⁶⁸ gave birth to seven children, but none of the sons of this marriage reached the age of ten.⁶⁹ Some of the daughters survived Filelfo. Thus Filelfo had to care for a numerous family. In 1448 he complained about the difficulties of supporting a large family in a time of dearth and famine.⁷⁰ Both Francesco Sforza and Galeazzo Maria Sforza received letters explaining the demands made upon Filelfo by such a numerous family: 'Each month I need for my house seven bushels of flour and eight casks of wine, which I buy drop by drop and similarly the flour by half pounds, taking up credit and begging now here now there in a manner that I detest.'⁷¹ In 1472 Filelfo had 14 people to support.⁷² A constant source of trouble were the daughters for whom Filelfo had to scrape together dowries. Most of the begging letters and the poems

soliciting some gift are concerned with dowries.⁷³ From 1451 onwards, when his eldest daughter Panthea married Girolamo Bindotti of Siena,⁷⁴ there was a regular succession of almost one marriage every two years.⁷⁵ The average dowry for a girl of the higher layers of society amounted to about 200-500 ducats.⁷⁶ It is easy to imagine what difficulties this continuous drain of cash meant for a humanist who had no rentable property and very slender liquidities because of his personal propensity to spend at once whatever cash he had available. Even had he been paid regularly his nominal salary without any deductions, the defraying of at least 200 ducats every second year meant that his disposable income would in any case have been only 500 ducats p.a.

Apart from the sustenance of his family Filelfo incurred quite substantial expenses for his household and his library. To lead a social life adequate to his dignity as court poet Filelfo needed a large house with numerous servants, horses, etc.⁷⁷ It is true he could have economized a lot on this, but he was a true product of the Italian Renaissance in his desire for outward signs of recognition and prestige, in his strong taste for pageantry and ostentation. Hence the purple silk garment was dearest to his heart, for it was the dress appropriate for a 'vates'. Filelfo showed indefatigable concern for other humanists as long as they recognized his superiority. He offered lavish hospitality to anybody who visited him, and being a famous man he had numerous visitors every day. Pupils and friends lodged with him,⁷⁸ his house was a frequent meeting place for those people at Milan interested in humanism,⁷⁹ and particularly the Greeks who strayed through Italy after 1453 could always count on Filelfo's generous help. He offered them shelter, alleviated their most urgent material needs and provided them with recommendations for their

further journeys.⁸⁰ After the death of his son Xenophon he offered to care for Xenophon's family;⁸¹ when Girolamo Bindotti tried to disclaim responsibility for his own children, Filelfo agreed to let at least one of them, his eldest grandson, stay at Milan.⁸²

A veritable fortune must have been spent by Filelfo on books and scribes. For his library and for his own speedy production he usually kept at least one amanuensis trained in both Greek and Latin, sometimes he even had two.⁸³ Towards the end of his life he employed increasingly relatives for this job, be it grandchildren or nephews.⁸⁴ In order to have books copied and those sumptuous copies of presentation prepared which he offered to Alfonso of Naples, Pius II or Francesco Sforza, Filelfo had to buy rather costly material. He also had to employ an illuminator.⁸⁵ In the middle of the fifteenth century his collection of classical texts must have been one of the most complete and most conspicuous private libraries in Northern Italy. If it was surpassed by those of Bessarion and Palla Strozzi, these collectors had quite different funds at their disposal. For a humanist without substantial means to have put together through painstaking inquiries and purchases a library like Filelfo's must be appraised as an outstanding achievement. It was a great loss for Milan that because of Filelfo's perennial debts his entire library was dispersed after his death and that those volumes that did enter the cathedral library, according to Filelfo's testament, were subsequently sold to private collectors.⁸⁶

Mounting debts were, of course, one way in which Filelfo bridged the gap between his resources and his aspirations. From the earliest years we find that Filelfo borrowed quite recklessly and very extensively. This habit of shelving financial problems gave rise to a number of squalid incidents with his creditors. Before 1439 Filelfo

had been in trouble several times with various Venetian moneylenders.⁸⁷ The strange dispute with Leonardo Giustinian and with Francesco Barbaro over his books belongs also in this context.⁸⁸ At Milan his principal creditors were Vitaliano Borromeo and Gasparino da Casale. Other creditors, like Gaspare da Vimercato, Giovanni Chiappano and Antonio da Piacenza, who appear in the balance sheet of 1467 were his personal friends and therefore unlikely to be insistent on payment.⁸⁹ From the Borromeo bank Filelfo borrowed at the rate of about 1,000 lire per annum in the 1450s.⁹⁰ Gasparino da Casale was Filelfo's chief moneylender after 1468.⁹¹ By 1472 Filelfo had run up a debt of 900 ducats,⁹² and when Gasparino da Casale threatened to sell some of Filelfo's pawns - which included his most valuable manuscripts - Filelfo turned to Lorenzo de' Medici who was generous enough to redeem all securities for Filelfo.⁹³ From then onwards the Medici bank supplied most of Filelfo's short and long-term credits. As a result of this, the most precious manuscripts of Filelfo's library were later incorporated into the Medici library, since it is inconceivable that Filelfo should have repaid all his debts.⁹⁴

Another source of income consisted in presents, rewards for orations and poems, and gifts in kind which Filelfo received in large quantities. Aside from his stipend Filelfo received a number of presents from the dukes of Milan and their wives. The purpose of some letters and many poetical slips is to remind the duke of some imminent festivity, usually either Christmas or Easter, for on such occasions it was customary for the duke to distribute presents among his courtiers.⁹⁵ Secondly there was the infinite number of friends both at Milan and elsewhere who paid their tribute to Filelfo by sending gifts in kind which could be anything from cabbages and asparagus to a mule, from a Damascene dagger to almonds and hares.⁹⁶

But such gratuities were insignificant when compared with the presents made by other rulers, cardinals or popes. Alessandro Sforza, Lodovico Gonzaga, and Borso d'Este could always be relied upon to fill the need for a dowry or to send a new silk robe.⁹⁷ Federigo da Montefeltre, William of Montferrat and Sigismondo Malatesta showed their recognition in very palpable favours.⁹⁸ Among the ecclesiastical dignitaries one has to name Lodovico Trevisan, Francesco Gonzaga and Giovanni Arcimboldi as the most prominent patrons of Filelfo.⁹⁹ Pope Nicolas V gave Filelfo 500 ducats when Filelfo was in Rome in July 1453,¹⁰⁰ Paul II requited the dedication of the 'Cyropaedia' with 400 zecchini.¹⁰¹ Pius II, after having promised somewhat rashly to assign an annual pension of 200 ducats to Filelfo, had to realize after the first instalments that such payments would deplete the papal treasury too much, since all resources were needed for the war in Southern Italy and for the projected crusade against the Turks. This breach of promise earned him the virulent hatred of Filelfo who felt betrayed and offended in his honour.¹⁰² His reaction to the discontinuation of this pension is slightly more understandable when it is realized that Filelfo really depended on such payments from outside at a time when in Milan all payments had been suspended.

To sum up the strands of the picture of Francesco Filelfo's economic position as given in this chapter which intends to correct a widespread misconception about his means and character, it is essential to recognize the truth of Filelfo's repeated reassurances that he did not care for money as such. The frequent confessions that he was a stoic at heart were not merely meaningless verbiage. He wanted to live the life of the other leading humanists of his days, i.e. to afford a standard of living adequate to his claim of being the first among poets in Latin and in Greek. The correspondent of

cardinals and popes, the honoured guest of princes and patricians could not lead a simple life. The expenses incurred for the pleasures of ostentation - which were in no way exceptional for that time - for a very numerous family, for frequent travelling and for an enormous library must have been gigantic. In the absence of a personal independent income Filelfo had to rely entirely on what he was given by protectors. The shortage of money at Milan left him no choice but to appeal to various other princes for support.

Filelfo's dilemma, the irreconcilability of creative freedom and material needs, was in no way exceptional. To invoke the generosity of a prince in order to devote all efforts to artistic pursuits was common practice in the fifteenth century, and indeed in many subsequent centuries. Where Filelfo deserves criticism is not in his attempts to secure money, but in his shortcomings as a poet. If the 'Sforzias', the 'Odes', the 'De iocis et seriis' or the 'De morali disciplina' were really those incomparable treasures which Filelfo would like to make us believe they were, most modern critics would probably ignore Filelfo's 'begging system'. It is because even the most favourable assessment of Filelfo's work as a poet cannot justify the exaggerated claims which he himself made that one is left with the feeling of repulsion when reading the reiterated demands for money, whereas in the case of a greater man like Michelangelo or Titian such demands appear somehow excusable.

III. THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND AT MILAN.

In order to convey an impression of Francesco Filelfo's social position at Milan a threefold division appears most convenient, although it is a highly artificial one. One can distinguish broadly between patrons, normally men of noble rank who felt it their duty to sponsor a poet even if they were unable to appreciate what he wrote for lack of knowledge in Latin and Greek; friends, mostly senators, secretaries or ambassadors in the ducal administration who had partly also risen from comparatively low origins by virtue of intellectual talent; and ultimately colleagues, that is those teachers and secretaries who spent most of their time with classical studies and occupied a front place in the humanistic movement. The distinctions between these classes are of course always blurred, and many individual cases defy any such labelling. But for the sake of a lucid presentation this expedient may be permitted.

1. Patrons

Sforza Secondo was about fifteen years old when he first met Filelfo.¹ Through his tutor Mattia da Trevi he had heard about the Milanese humanist a long time before he actually saw him at Piacenza in December 1447.² After the conquest of this city on 16 November 1447 Francesco Sforza had left a garrison under the command of Tommasi Tebaldi; his son Sforza Secondo was to represent the authority of the new lord.³ In view of the general political instability Filelfo now saw the necessity of finding some arrangement with Florence, perhaps he also wanted to introduce himself to the son of a powerful general with a strong claim to the Visconti inheritance. Accordingly,

at Piacenza the first steps were taken to reconcile Filelfo with Cosimo de' Medici.⁴ With the victory of Francesco Sforza over Milan his son Sforza Secondo became one of Filelfo's keenest protectors. During the first year of Sforza rule Filelfo approached him repeatedly imploring his help in the settlement of the financial question.⁵ From Sforza Secondo the court poet also received some generous gifts which helped him to keep up a certain standard of living at a time when he had no other sources of income at all.⁶ Most important, however, was the prince's interest in poetry and literature, his sense of humour and witticism. The teaching of Mattia da Trevi had obviously had more effect upon this son excluded from the succession than that of Guiniforte Barzizza upon the heir apparent. In fact, Filelfo congratulated Sforza Secondo on the return of Mattia da Trevi and asked for the help of both in procuring a copy of Strabo.⁷ It was to this prince that Filelfo wrote his treatise on the origins of the 'Vulgare' in which he refuted the theory of Leonardo Bruni by pointing to the parallel development in Greece where the commonly spoken language was only a corrupted form of the pure literary language still preserved by an educated élite.⁸ In 1451 Filelfo sent him another lengthy letter explaining the duties and qualities of a nobleman.⁹ This letter was probably meant as a prelude to the marriage of Sforza Secondo with Antonia del Verme which took place shortly afterwards, celebrated by Filelfo with three witty, albeit rather explicit, poems.¹⁰ After this episode the only evidence for any direct contacts between Filelfo and Sforza Secondo is a letter written much later on 5 August 1475 when Sforza Secondo was on the point of joining the army of Charles the Bold of Burgundy.¹¹ The only other reference to Sforza Secondo appears in a letter to Mattia da Trevi in which Filelfo calls the prince affectionately 'my little king'.¹²

Carlo Gonzaga was for a few years Filelfo's most generous maecenas, idolized and glorified by the poet's gratitude like no other protector. Forced to leave Mantua after a serious quarrel with his brother Lodovico, Carlo Gonzaga had entered the services of Filippo Maria Visconti as a condottiere.¹³ His great hour came with the establishment of the Ambrosian Republic. First he served in the republican army under the command of Francesco Sforza, but after the realignment of alliances late in 1448 he changed sides together with the leaders of the Bracceschi Giacomo and Francesco Piccinino: they left Sforza's troops and offered to defend the Republic against the new alliance of Venice and Francesco Sforza. Carlo Gonzaga was now clearly attempting to lay the foundations for his own overlordship over Milan. Through being captain of the people he rose to a predominant position during the brief aristocratic reaction in July and August 1449. Filelfo pronounced an impressive speech on this occasion and roughly at the same time he complained to Carlo about the radical party. In another satire Filelfo addressed the Milanese people inviting them to sink their internal differences and to rally around Carlo Gonzaga.¹⁴ The Odes to Carlo Gonzaga written at about the same time testify that by 1449 the captain of the people had become Filelfo's chief patron. Both Gonzaga and Filelfo were completely committed to the aristocratic ghibellines so that they were united by common political interests. Carlo Gonzaga also saw the need for securing a positive image through the right kind of publicity for himself and for this end he hoped to employ Filelfo. From these poems we are left with the impression that Carlo Gonzaga virtually saved Filelfo's life during the famine in Milan.¹⁵ Later Filelfo had to ask him not to continue his generosity on the same scale. With the victory of Francesco Sforza, Carlo Gonzaga had been chased away from Milan.

If he now continued to shower gifts upon Filelfo, the poet's loyalty to the duke might be suspected. But notwithstanding the enmity between Francesco Sforza and Carlo Gonzaga, Filelfo's attachment to the latter remained remarkable.¹⁶ The chief factor that had knit together the warrior and the poet had been Filelfo's services in the love affair between a woman of Piacenza, called Lida, and the general of the Sforza army. We are given an extensive account of this dubious affair in the fourth book of the 'Sforzias'. During Filelfo's presence in Piacenza Carlo Gonzaga had commissioned him to write love letters to Lida, and the versified letter of Mercury - Mercury was Filelfo's emblem¹⁷ - in the fourth book of the 'Sforzias' represents probably very literally what had been written on this occasion. Afterwards Filelfo continued to act as go-between, and the affair reverberated as late as 1454 in Filelfo's Odes.¹⁸ The fourth book of the 'Sforzias' has been rightly called an 'encomium of adultery'; in its psychology and terminology it never leaves the repulsive milieu of prostitution.¹⁹ But this was precisely Filelfo's poetical weakness: volatile and lacking in a decided sense for tact or taste, always eager to reap recognition and rewards, he wrote according to the tastes of his audience, and if he was not guided by a sensible patron he could fall headlong into the lurid twilight of vulgar obscenities.²⁰ Even after Carlo Gonzaga had been forced to leave the Milanese court in 1451 Filelfo remembered him with gratitude and admiration. The fourth book of the 'Sforzias' was written in about 1454, and even after that time a constant flow of letters went to Venice where Carlo Gonzaga had taken refuge. Until Carlo Gonzaga's death Filelfo referred to him as 'my most noble hero' or 'my maecenas'.²¹

When Filelfo arrived at Milan in 1439 one of the most conspicuous personalities in the city was Vitaliano Borromeo.²² Not only was he

the richest merchant and banker, founder of a famous patrician family, but he occupied also a prominent place in the administration of the Visconti and then of the Ambrosian Republic.²³ The first major work Filelfo wrote at Milan was dedicated to him, the 'Commentationes Florentinae de exilio'. It is not known how Vitaliano Borromeo received this strange work, nor is it possible to reconstruct the relationship between the merchant and the humanist since no letters were exchanged between people who saw each other practically every day. But Filelfo would never have been invited to address the citizens of Pavia on behalf of their new bishop Giacomo Borromeo²⁴ if he had not been a welcome and esteemed friend of the family.²⁵ The close connections survived also after the death of Vitaliano Borromeo. On 20 August 1464 Filelfo pronounced the funeral oration for Vitaliano's son Filippo,²⁶ and some epigrams in 'De iocis et seriis' suggest that Filelfo was also on good terms with Filippo's children Giovanni and Vitaliano.²⁷ The material reason behind his close connection consisted in the banking services the Borromeos offered to Filelfo. Starting with sums like 400 to 500 lire under the Visconti, Filelfo drew about 1,000 lire annually on credit from the Borromeo bank during the years of dearth under Francesco Sforza.²⁸

The accession of Francesco Sforza brought two personages to the forefront of Milanese politics and society: Cicco Simonetta and Gaspare da Vimercato.

Cicco Simonetta²⁹ had been recommended to Francesco Sforza by his uncle Angelo Simonetta. Having risen from humble origins in Southern Italy he soon became the duke's private secretary with almost unlimited powers to decide and advise. All documents were drawn up under his supervision, he was responsible for the routine business of current affairs, he represented continuity and efficiency in the

Milanese administration for thirty years. Indeed, when Lodovico il Moro seized power in Milan, he regarded Cicco Simonetta as his chief enemy. Consequently the old statesman was imprisoned, because his unwavering allegiance to the legitimate heir posed a threat to Lodovico's schemes; on 30 October 1480 he was beheaded on a trumped-up conspiracy charge.

His name occurs most frequently among the addressees of Filelfian letters and epigrams. Yet even so the surviving letters are far from being complete. References to letters evidently lost suggest that the real correspondence was at least twice as large.³⁰ Most of the surviving letters are concerned with money, or rather Filelfo's want of an adequate income. Before Filelfo's appointment to a chair of rhetoric it was Cicco Simonetta who had to endure the brunt of Filelfo's petitions.³¹ Afterwards he had to listen to Filelfo's repeated complaints that he was not being paid what he was entitled to. Cicco bore the continuous flood of letters with remarkable equanimity. Only once something like impatience can be detected in his reaction. In his letter to the treasurers of 11 January 1452 he concluded: 'And let no delay or default intervene in this affair, so that Filelfo does not need to return to us with such complaints which really are beginning to annoy us.'³² Filelfo tried to excuse himself:

Importunus ego non sum tibi, Cicche, vocandus,
Ast importunus, qui facit, ut videar. 33

Apart from his usefulness as the head of the Sforza administration Cicco Simonetta also became a close personal friend of Filelfo. He occasionally sent Filelfo some game or rare birds; Filelfo received loans from him and in the 1460s Filelfo quite frequently confided to Cicco epigrams or letters sharply critical of the duke.³⁴ Filelfo

put full trust in Cicco. He knew that Cicco followed with great attention and sympathy all humanist activities and that he would always do his best to help a man of Filelfo's standing.³⁵ With the succession of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Cicco's power increased substantially, since the young duke, inexperienced and unsteady, left the entire day-to-day administration in Cicco's hands.³⁶ Cicco soon realized what the duke's true sentiments were towards his court poet, but he tried to mediate in vain. Galeazzo Maria Sforza was determined to get Filelfo away from Milan, and Filelfo rejected any illusions, countering that he could not approve of Cicco's trying to give assurances which he himself knew not to be true.³⁷ It was Cicco who persuaded the duke finally to grant leave to Filelfo for seeking employment elsewhere. It was he who conducted the negotiations with Bologna in 1471 on Filelfo's behalf,³⁸ he supported Filelfo's other attempts at finding a position in Pisa³⁹ and in Rome.⁴⁰ Filelfo's intelligence reports from Rome were directed to Cicco who also replied in the duke's name.⁴¹ Filelfo acknowledged this friendship with gratitude: 'If I did not venerate and honour you, Cicco - quite apart from loving you - I would be liable to be accused of ingratitude. Whom do you not help, when help is needed, for whom do you not care, to whom do you not show yourself generous? You have given me previously on several occasions both various presents and considerable sums of money. Just now, however, as you heard that I was suffering badly from a shortage of food and drink - for the promised rewards of my efforts are not forthcoming - you sent a substantial amount of wine and flour to me as a present. One point I want to make known to everybody: I would have left Lombardy a long time ago, if I had not been kept up to now by your care and generosity.'⁴² Cicco's perfect grasp of both Latin and Greek gave Filelfo the feeling that

his poetry was being appreciated by the ducal secretary. It was this attitude that explains Filelfo's final decision to remain in Milan in 1477 after the assassination of Galeazzo Maria Sforza.

Through Cicco, Filelfo was in close touch with the other members of the Simonetta family. Angelo Simonetta, senator and experienced diplomat,⁴³ was approached by Filelfo on several occasions in order to obtain certain favours. In his house, as in that of his nephew, Filelfo was a frequent guest.⁴⁴

Cicco's cousin Gentile Simonetta⁴⁵ received a number of typical and partly very priapean epigrams, now contained in 'De iocis et seriis'.⁴⁶ Cicco's eldest son Gian Giacomo⁴⁷ was tutored carefully by Filelfo who taught him Greek, Latin and history. He recorded later with satisfaction his pupil's promotion within the ducal administration.⁴⁸

Most important, however, was Filelfo's impact on Giovanni Simonetta, Cicco's brother.⁴⁹ Apart from being addressed in several letters, epigrams, an ode and an oration, delivered by Filelfo at his wedding,⁵⁰ he owed a great deal to the humanist for help and advice on his 'Commentaries'.⁵¹ Filelfo himself had compiled extensive material for a biography of Francesco Sforza, yet no evidence has survived to hint that the work was ever finished; it obviously never grew beyond the stage of planning. This lends some plausibility to the view that Filelfo was one of the authorities to whom Giovanni Simonetta referred for the account of events prior to 1446.⁵² One may even suspect that Filelfo's fragmentary biography of Francesco Sforza was incorporated into the work of Giovanni Simonetta. Certainly Filelfo read and corrected the work before publication.⁵³

Gaspare da Vimercato⁵⁴ had risen to a key position under the first Sforza through his decisive action on 25 February 1450 which had

delivered Milan to Francesco Sforza. By dint of his unconditional loyalty he enjoyed the unlimited confidence of the duke who entrusted to him various precarious political responsibilities like, for example, the government of Genova after her submission to Milanese rule.⁵⁵ Since Filelfo met him regularly at court very little reflection of their relationship can be found in the letters.⁵⁶ But in 'De iocis et seriis' Gaspare da Vimercato is clearly the most dominant figure. His tastes, like those of Carlo Gonzaga, whose place in Filelfo's life he took over, were not very refined. He loved the conventional pastimes of the nobility like warfare and hunting, he was but superficially touched by the fresh stream of humanism. Filelfo's verse addressed to him shows a strong tendency to dwell on amorous adventures, though never relapsing into that depth of vulgarity which marked the description of Carlo Gonzaga's affair with Lida.⁵⁷ Filelfo maintained in his poetical notes to the count a tone of frivolous humour. He obviously put great trust in Gaspare's ability to promote the interests of his clients, but he probably sought in vain an acknowledgement of his own more serious talents: Gaspare da Vimercato offered protection to Filelfo largely because this was the done thing for a man in his position. He would have equally extended his protection to a jester or a fool.

Apart from these five chief patrons there existed a host of lesser sponsors who sometimes turned to Filelfo only for some occasional poetry. They included both noblemen and members of the old patrician families of Milan: Count Giovanni d'Angusciola,⁵⁸ Lodovico, count of Cuneo⁵⁹ and Francesco, count of Archi⁶⁰ paid their tribute to the poet by sending gifts; they received in exchange epigrams expressing partly gratitude, partly bawdy mockery. For the reconstruction of the system of patronage under Filippo Maria Visconti we have to rely almost

exclusively on the names listed in the two 'Convivia'.⁶¹ A leading role in inviting Filelfo had been played by Gianfrancesco Gallina;⁶² as early as 1432 Guarnerio Castellione⁶³ and Luigi Crotti⁶⁴ were named among Filelfo's protectors. But about what they did for him and how he acknowledged their patronage we know as little as about the precise nature of Filelfo's relations with the Visconti general Biagio Assereto.⁶⁵

2. Friends

The mainstay of the humanistic movement in Milan, as in Florence and Venice, was the strong group of citizens that had risen to a respectable position through the professions, that is to say the growing upper stratum of an urban middle class: lawyers, physicians and secretaries in the ducal administration, whose parents had frequently been in some humble occupation, formed the circle of closest friends around Filelfo. Among them he found recognition, he was accepted as an equal, his ideas and aspirations were shared and most of these friends were able to appreciate puns and jokes, to compose a Latin epigram or to write an elaborate Latin letter. With these friends Filelfo held regular meetings for discussion, of which the 'Convivia' are an idealized description;⁶⁶ invitations for dinners and festivities were circulated and the latest literary products were exchanged, discussed and criticized. They were the first to receive a copy of a new work written by Filelfo. As a rule, Filelfo could rest assured of their admiration.⁶⁷

First among all these congenial friends ranks Nicodemo Tranchadini, probably the most conspicuous figure politically and culturally in the service of the first two Sforzas.⁶⁸ The intimate friendship between Francesco Filelfo and Nicodemo Tranchadini, unperturbed by any misunderstandings, lasted until their deaths in 1481. Filelfo

wrote more than one hundred letters to his friend, begging him to work for the lifting of the banishment of Florence⁶⁹ or urging him to speak a word in his favour at Rome.⁷⁰ Nicodemo was the first to receive drafts of any new work that was being written by Filelfo, he shared the humanist's anxieties and participated in the poet's successes. His sound education enabled him to appreciate Filelfo's writings and he lavished expressions of flattering admiration on his friend. The importance Tranchedini attached to this friendship with Filelfo is spotlighted by the fact that in the collection of his correspondence - which comprises unfortunately only letters received - the letters written by Filelfo occupy the first pages, thus taking precedence over popes and cardinals.⁷¹ Filelfo knew he could rely on Nicodemo. He spiced his letters frequently with ironic remarks, for he could confidently anticipate that Tranchedini had enough sense of humour not to take offence.⁷² In these letters Filelfo kept Tranchedini informed about life at Milan, although as ambassador of the Sforza Nicodemo Tranchedini had to return regularly to Milan in order to report and to receive instructions.⁷³ From 1460 onwards Filelfo developed the habit of writing to Nicodemo each year on 25 July which was his birthday. He continued this tradition even in his very last years when Tranchedini had returned to Milan.⁷⁴ The purpose of these letters may have been that Filelfo, who was always writing with one eye fixed on fame and posterity, wanted to be always remembered in conjunction with his best friend, and Nicodemo Tranchedini certainly realized the documentary value of these letters in carefully collecting them. On numerous other occasions Filelfo stressed the singular character of their relationship which was above all based on common ideals, mutual respect and temperamental affinity.⁷⁵ In a letter to Nicodemo's son Francesco Tranchedini,

Filelfo even went so far as to say: 'For such is my love for Nicodemo, your father, that I consider him to be my second self.'⁷⁶

Francesco Tranchedini⁷⁷ had been educated by Filelfo for several years.⁷⁸ He inherited his father's admiration for the poet who may have been responsible for kindling in the young Tranchedini both the desire and the ability to write Latin verse.⁷⁹

The Tranchedinis are a typical example of the new intellectual élite that ran the Milanese administration. It was recruited to a surprising extent not from Milanese subjects but from outside people who had displayed successfully intellectual ability and thus attracted the duke's attention, very much like Filelfo himself.⁸⁰ Another representative of this type was Tommaso Tebaldi.⁸¹ Born in Bologna he was initiated into humanism by Antonio Panormita who celebrated this young man under the name of 'Ergoteles'. Tommaso Tebaldi soon afterwards captured the favour of Filippo Maria Visconti under whose rule he began to rise steadily until by the time of Francesco Sforza he was employed in difficult diplomatic missions. He died in possession of vast feudal lands. Through his close association with Panormita he was predestined to be a close friend of Filelfo, too, who in fact dedicated the two 'Convivia' to Tebaldi. Naturally he reappears among the addressees in 'De iocis et seriis', some very good pieces of which were composed for him.⁸² When Tommaso Tebaldi visited France as the envoy of Francesco Sforza, Filelfo wrote to Guillaume des Ursins: 'Nobody is a closer friend to me than this one man, and there is none whom I wish more success for his plans. For he loves me in a singular fashion and is loved by me so much that our friendship could rightly be placed among those examples of friendship which all antiquity admired because of their rarity.'⁸³

Niccolò Arcimboldi⁸⁴ was the first member of Milanese court society with whom Filelfo came into contact as early as 1428. Under Filippo Maria Visconti, Niccolò Arcimboldi could indubitably claim the first place among the promoters of humanistic studies. He was deeply involved in the university of Pavia, he showed an unfailing interest in all studies concerned with Greek and Latin, he exchanged letters with Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Giovanni Aurispa, Pier Candido Decembrio and many other humanists.⁸⁵ During the experiment of the Ambrosian Republic he was the speaker of Milan confronting the imperial envoys; in 1450 his name appeared among the first members of the Secret Council. Filelfo cultivated this friendship very carefully. Not only was Niccolò Arcimboldi a powerful politician and an excellent lawyer, he also showed a rare generosity to people in need and a sincere appreciation of what was dedicated to him. Filelfo extolled him in one of his Satires,⁸⁶ sent him two Odes,⁸⁷ assigned a prominent place in the 'Sforzias' to him⁸⁸ and gave him some samples of his epigrams.⁸⁹ After Niccolò's death his sons Giovanni and Guidantonio Arcimboldi received a long letter in which Filelfo described with genuine admiration their father's stern, steadfast character, the versatility of his mind, his sense for political responsibility and his literary talents.⁹⁰

Francesco Filelfo had been the teacher of both these sons of Niccolò Arcimboldi.

Princivalle Lampugnano and Giovanni Mattia Bottigella were not only friends, but comrades in Filelfo's less spiritual adventures. Even if they did not show much appreciation for serious Latin prose or poetry, they shared Filelfo's taste for amorous exploits. Accordingly they received similar epigrams as Gaspare da Vimercato.⁹² It is difficult to assess the truth of such epigrams. They may

reflect some real experiences, but more likely they are merely products of the enjoyment of frivolous, saucy stories of Boccaccesque character. In a similar way Filelfo's explanation of his virile prowess by claiming that he had three testicles is only a literary topos.⁹³ The freedom with which sexual matters were described explicitly was in no way exceptional. It corresponded to the tastes of a great many men who knew enough Latin to understand lascivious details, but had not been touched by the serious ideals of humanism. Filelfo, the poet, claimed for himself the same liberty which Catullus or Martial had enjoyed, and people who were unwilling or unable to deal with more intricate problems of philosophy were enraptured by the lubricity of Filelfo's verse. For all its humanistic pose it is apparent how strongly Milanese court society in the mid-fifteenth century was still harking back to medieval tastes for literary genres like the religious, edifying poem or the entertaining farce. Filelfo only lent this taste a thin classical cloak. However one is to judge this aspect of Filelfo's poetry, it is essential to realize that in these compositions he was but following a public fashion. Filelfo appears again as weak-willed, purely reproductive, a poet who followed the standards of his environment for the sake of recognition and rewards.

Among the duke's ambassadors Gerardo Colle deserves particular attention besides Nicodemo Tranchedini.⁹⁴ Between 1464 and 1470 Filelfo sent a large number of letters to Gerardo Colle who was at that time Milanese ambassador in Venice.⁹⁵ Through some fortunate accident a letter of Gerardo Colle concerning Filelfo has been preserved⁹⁶ from which it appears that Filelfo's friendship was fully reciprocated by the diplomat who had risen in the Sforza administration as a nephew of Angelo Simonetta.⁹⁷ Certainly Filelfo had met Gerardo

Colle at Milan long before the first letter was written, for the entire correspondence is governed by a light, frivolous tone with frequent ironic remarks or cynicisms interspersed in which Filelfo poked fun at Colle's obesity, at his amorous adventures and at his phlegmatic laziness.⁹⁸ Such letters could only have been exchanged by friends who could rest assured of each other's sense of humour and good-will. Gerardo Colle's main responsibilities at Venice consisted in keeping his lord informed about Venetian politics, particularly in regard to the Turks. Since Filelfo took a keen interest also in the development of these affairs, he urged his friend to supply ample information to him. Gerardo Colle obligingly sent not only news about the Venetian expedition under Sigismondo Malatesta,⁹⁹ he also dispatched two long assessments of the political situation and the military strength of the Turks to Filelfo in 1467.¹⁰⁰

Gerardo Colle is only the most prominent among Filelfo's friends in the diplomatic service. In order to be entrusted with a mission to a foreign state one had to possess both political skill and rhetorical refinement. From the earliest days of humanism people who felt attracted to the studies of grammar, rhetoric, poetry and history were in high demand for drawing up state documents or for lending an official state function the ceremonial dignity of a Latin harangue.¹⁰¹ It is no coincidence that so many humanists played a leading part in contemporary politics as ambassadors, or conversely that so many citizens who aspired to a public career felt the need to equip themselves with the necessary tools of Latin, history and the rhetorical formulae that characterized official political ceremonies of that time. Enea Silvio Piccolomini and Gianozzo Manetti are the most successful representatives of the humanist-ambassador.¹⁰² A congress like the one convened by Pius II at Mantua in 1459 was therefore predominantly an assembly of humanists. This structure of

society is typically reflected in the composition of the circle of Filelfo's friends where we find, aside from those persons already mentioned, such eminent names as Andrea Birago,¹⁰³ Ottone da Carretto,¹⁰⁴ Agostino Rossi,¹⁰⁵ Sacramoro Sacramori,¹⁰⁶ Gerardo Cerruti,¹⁰⁷ Leonardo Botta¹⁰⁸ and Marchesio Varesini;¹⁰⁹ of those ambassadors of foreign powers resident in Milan, Filelfo was in close contact with Zaccaria Saggio da Pisa,¹¹⁰ Marco Aurelio,¹¹¹ Antonio Cincinelli¹¹² and Lodovico Petroni.¹¹³

Another group which by virtue of its social standing and intellectual training tended to favour the humanistic studies was the medical profession. Filelfo himself was deeply interested in medicine. He translated two small works of Hippocrates and showed a surprising grasp of Galen.¹¹⁴ Gaspare da Pesaro, physician of Francesco Sforza, belonged to that rising middle class which dabbled in humanism more because it needed to win prestige and social distinction than because of a genuine interest. He, like Princivalle Lampugnano and Giovanni Mattia Bottigella, represented a strong group of citizens who had benefited from lay education in the humanistic syllabus, but who nevertheless retained the 'medieval' tastes for the farcical anecdote, the edifying religious story and the bawdy tale which had constituted the chief literary genres of previous generations of vagrant scholars. Filelfo pandered to these tastes in his epigrams:

...Dum multas futuo, pignora multa paro.
 Saemine si, Gaspar, magnum capit Italia nostro
 Lingua decus, Venerem quis mihi det vitio?
 Philosophos, ut vera loquer, diosque poetas
 Elloquioque graves mentula nostra serit.
 Haec ego clam tecum, nam docti munera penis
 Nolo quaeque sciat foemina pulchra mea. 115

Or in a different key:

Ecce dies, Botigella, quibus vaesana parentum
 Sustulit errata virque deusque crure.
 Iam decet hinc miseros, heu, nos resipiscere tandem
 Et recto gressus tendere calle pios.
 Poenituisse decet sceleris, quodcunque patratum est,
 Haec agit ad Christum, quae via prima datur.
 Nec gravis id faciat poenae formido futurae,
 Sed dolor errati, sed pietatis amor.
 Ergo deum lachrymis iterumque iterumque precemur,
 Mitis ut ignoscat, ut ferat unus opem.
 Quotidie morimur, Botigella, nec ulla salutis
 Est nobis cura, quotidie morimur.
 Quid facimus miseri, quae tanta insania menti
 Insidet? Hostis atrox praevalet insidiis.
 O pater omnipotens, qui nostra errata cruore
 Dilueras sancto vulneris innumeri
 Auxiliare tuis facinusque nefasque remitte
 Teque tui similem semper ubique doce.
 Munus eo maius, quo minus usque meremur,
 Sit tibi nos sceleris poenituisse satis. 116

Ambrogio Grifo¹¹⁷ and Lazzaro da Piacenza,¹¹⁸ physicians of

Galeazzo Maria Sforza and of Bona of Savoy, were of a different mettle.

Ambrogio Grifo had been Filelfo's pupil; Lazzaro da Piacenza's name
 appears so frequently in conjunction with that of Ambrogio Grifo that
 one suspects he, too, may have studied under Filelfo.¹¹⁹ Although
 they were friends with Filelfo long before 1468,¹²⁰ they appear among
 his correspondents only with the arrival of Bona of Savoy.¹²¹ Filelfo
 called upon their medical advice in some cases, especially during
 the last illness of his wife,¹²² but primarily he cultivated the
 friendship with the two physicians because they showed interest in
 his work and were powerful patrons at court.¹²³

They formed part of the new generation of intellectuals at the
 Milanese court which had grown up entirely within the new cultural
 trend. To this group Fabrizio Elfiteo¹²⁴ and Bartolomeo Calco¹²⁵
 also belonged, both of whom contributed greatly to turn Milan into
 a fertile centre of writing and printing under the rule of Lodovico
 il Moro.¹²⁶ Both had profited from the teaching facilities available
 in Milan in the 1450s by taking lessons in Greek and Latin. Bartolomeo

Calco took over Cicco Simonetta's position in 1480, he had been responsible for inviting Giacomo Antiquario to Milan and later he was to patronize Giorgio Merula. The relations with Filelfo are not well attested, most of the letters Filelfo sent to him were concerned with financial demands and belong to the very last years of Filelfo's life. But even in the absence of conclusive evidence before 1475, it may be safely postulated that the two men were closely linked together in the pursuit of similar aims.¹²⁷

During the last decade of Filelfo's life Fabrizio Elfiteo rose to a pre-eminent position among his friends. Filelfo entrusted his wife to Elfiteo's care during the two spells of his absence at Rome;¹²⁸ Fabrizio Elfiteo even received letters written in Greek, a rare distinction in Filelfian terms, since it manifested Filelfo's respect for the ducal secretary's scholarly efforts.¹²⁹ Filelfo also entrusted the latest news from Rome to Elfiteo who generally showed a marked deference for Filelfo.¹³⁰

The list of people influenced by Filelfo at Milan could be much more extended. There figure conspicuously Sceva da Curte,¹³¹ senator and diplomat, Giovanni Feruffini,¹³² head of a powerful and wealthy Milanese family, Pietro Pusterla,¹³³ leader of the ghibelline faction, Biagio Ghilini,¹³⁴ abbot of S. Ambrogio and permanently resident in Rome, Carlo Barbavara¹³⁵ and most of the other secretaries, ambassadors, lawyers and counsellors of the ducal administration.

3. Colleagues

Filelfo's impact was particularly strong, be it in a positive or in a negative sense, on those who tried to imitate him by devoting most of their time to classical studies or specifically to Latin and Greek verse composition.

One of the first to make contact with Filelfo among the leading humanists in Lombardy was Cato Sacco.¹³⁶ He had taken a prominent part in the disputes at Pavia between Lorenzo Valla and the law faculty,¹³⁷ and he was a regular correspondent of Antonio Panormita.¹³⁸ In the university of Pavia he was equally an outstanding lawyer and a leading protagonist of humanism. Francesco Filelfo therefore once called him the 'Homer of lawyers'. Filelfo's frequent visits to Pavia rendered a steady correspondence unnecessary. Those sporadic documents that survive depict a very harmonious friendship which lasted without any tensions until Sacco's death in 1463. Filelfo had to answer several questions on classical topics,¹³⁹ Cato Sacco introduced Filelfo to a number of other humanists in Northern Italy; most portentous was Sacco's introduction of Theodore Gaza to Francesco Filelfo, for it formed the basis for a deep and long-lasting friendship between the two experts in Greek.¹⁴⁰ The cordiality and congeniality of the relationship between the professor at Pavia and the poet at Milan is warranted by the humorous tone of their correspondence which is studded with ironical, uninhibited allusions.¹⁴¹ After the death of Cato Sacco Filelfo composed for him a fine epitaph in which he praised Sacco's achievements in law, philosophy and the other fields of humanistic learning.¹⁴²

At the court of Filippo Maria Visconti Filelfo met again Guiniforte Barzizza, the son of his master Gaspare.¹⁴³ Up to 1447 Guiniforte was employed as secretary in the ducal administration; after 1450 he was appointed tutor of Galeazzo Maria Sforza. He may have been respected by Filelfo, but there was certainly not much exchange of ideas between these two humanists.¹⁴⁴

Towards Antonio da Rho¹⁴⁵ Filelfo showed at first much cordiality,¹⁴⁶ but shortly after his arrival at Milan Filelfo attacked

Antonio's treatise on Lactantius with such virulent acrimony that all further contact became impossible.¹⁴⁷

More famous than the squabble with Antonio da Rho was Filelfo's protracted struggle against Pier Candido Decembrio,¹⁴⁸ whom he always regarded as his archenemy like Poggio or Marsuppini. Accordingly, a continuous barrage of denigrating abuse and acid ridicule was poured over the hated antagonist, who in his turn retorted with ammunition of the same calibre. Nothing precise is known about the origins of Filelfo's furious polemic with Decembrio. By the time the only letter included in Filelfo's official correspondence was written, the fronts were already clear.¹⁴⁹ First of all prestige and ambition may have played a large part. By 1439 Pier Candido Decembrio had entrenched himself firmly as the chief representative of humanism in Lombardy; as such he was recognized and complimented in all Europe from Spain to England. Filelfo came to wrest this position from him. Their hostility was at once increased by Filippo Maria Visconti who clearly favoured Filelfo more than Decembrio, allotting to the former a salary at least twice as large as Decembrio's. At court Filelfo was given a rank superior to that of a mere secretary, and such snubs were more than sufficient to incense Decembrio who probably complained and intrigued against the arrogant intruder. Through his previous feuds Decembrio had alienated Leonardo Bruni, Antonio Panormita and Guarino da Verona, all of whom were particularly close friends of Filelfo.¹⁵⁰ Feelings on both sides were further exacerbated by Decembrio's translations from the Greek, for which Filelfo called him a plagiarist and an imposter. Filelfo felt that translating from the Greek was his personal demesne. Admittedly Decembrio's grasp of the Greek language was bound to be inferior to Filelfo's, but such inferiority only spurred Decembrio on to try to

efface his rival nevertheless with popular translations. He translated several cantoes from Homer's *Ilias*,¹⁵¹ a task for which Filelfo regarded everybody unfit save himself.¹⁵² Decembrio's translation of Appian was regarded by Filelfo as a worthless muddle; Filelfo provided a rival version later. Perhaps one is right in suspecting that an anonymous translation of Plutarch's 'Apophthegmata' with a polemic preface against Filelfo emanated from Decembrio's pen.¹⁵³ Be this as it may, the exchange of recriminating invectives between the two humanists belongs to the famous literary feuds of Italian humanism.

In his habit of inventing nicknames for his adversaries Filelfo called Decembrio 'Leucus'. Apart from the numerous direct invectives against Decembrio, Filelfo missed no opportunity of slotting in a side-attack on this odious enemy into almost every work he wrote,¹⁵⁴ very much like those remarks in his earlier works which lunge at Poggio. With minor variations all the charges made against Poggio were now hurled against the Milanese rival: theft, dishonesty, drunkenness, and, of course, sexual perversion.

After the conquest of Milan by Francesco Sforza, Pier Candido Decembrio took refuge first at Rome, then at Naples.¹⁵⁵ From Naples he tried to win back the favour of the duke of Milan some years later by sending an epitaph for the duke's mother, Lucia Sforza. Filelfo at once attacked this poem discovering numerous grammatical and stylistic flaws.¹⁵⁶ Filelfo's reaction may have been prompted by the fear that if Decembrio were to be successful in regaining the duke's favour, he would be lumbered with a powerful rival again with whom he might even have to share the scarce resources available to humanists in Milan. But fortunately for Filelfo, the duke who had already 'enough with one Filelfo',¹⁵⁷ was disinclined to add further to his expenses for patronage. For the following years Filelfo's

'De locis et seriis' is teeming with insults to Decembrio. Unfortunately no document has survived to illustrate the fight after 1465. In 1467 Decembrio took up residence in Ferrara and nine years later he returned to Milan where he died in 1477.

Decembrio's repartees have partly survived. Although he makes a more moderate impression in his letters, he did not mince his words in his poetry. To Lanzilotto Crivelli he wrote: 'If people that are not totally ignorant have once made a mistake and if they are reproached by learned men, they use to heed such admonitions and to thank their critics. It is typical for stupid and ignorant people, like your silly Greek, to flare up in anger and to bark. Let him slander and write as much as he likes, for he has a powerful instrument to advertise his stupidity.'¹⁵⁸ In his verse even Decembrio did not shrink from repaying his adversary in kind:

Iamque, Philelphe, tua gaudemus stultitia, qua
 Posteritas te contemnet te rideat omnis.
 Principis at nostri sortem miseramur iniquam,
 Porcellum turpem nutrit qui forfure dignum. 159

Also the passage in Decembrio's 'Life of Filippo Maria Visconti' referring to 'Francesco with the silly beard, a little Greek poet',¹⁶⁰ is obviously directed against Filelfo who kept the beard he had grown in Constantinople at least until the death of his first wife Theodora Chrysolora.¹⁶¹

A similar feud developed between Filelfo and Porcellio de' Pandoni.¹⁶¹ A brief period of mutual flattery soon turned into a permanent hatred. In 1456 Porcellio had been dispatched as an ambassador by Sigismondo Malatesta to Milan.¹⁶³ Filelfo was delighted to meet a man so similar in his career and in his tastes to himself, for of all the Italian humanists of the 15th century Porcellio shows easily the greatest affinity to Filelfo. Porcellio expressed this

resemblance poignantly in an epigram.¹⁶⁴ Soon it was agreed that Porcellio was to stay in Milan in the service of Francesco Sforza. The two humanists exchanged frequent epigrams, the licentious tone of which warranted the level of intimacy in their friendship.¹⁶⁵ Porcellio joined at once in the vilification campaign against Decembrio.¹⁶⁶ He also shared most of Filelfo's patrons and friends, first among them Gaspare da Vimercato, whom he called 'Pollio'. For the first few months of his stay at Milan Porcellio was the personal guest in Filelfo's house.¹⁶⁷ Towards the end of 1456, however, their relationship became tense: Porcellio refused to return the 'Commentationes Florentinae de exilio' which Filelfo had lent him.¹⁶⁸ In 1457 the discord flared up into a full blown series of invectives,¹⁶⁹ the reverberations of which were still felt ten years later.¹⁷⁰

Another personality of primary importance for the evolution of humanism in Milan was Gregorio da Città di Castello¹⁷¹ who was invited to come to Milan at the same time as Porcellio. In the 1430s he had spent several years in Constantinople and belonged therefore to the small number of Italians who had a first-hand experience of Greek. He came to Milan after having become redundant at Rome as a result of the election of Calixt III. At Milan he taught Greek for almost a year in 1456. Bartolomeo Calco and Giorgio Merula were to gratefully remember his teaching later. But dissatisfied with the meagre recompense he was awarded for his efforts at Milan, he left towards the end of 1456 in order to go to Paris. Filelfo deplored his departure, and when in 1459 Gregorio returned from France Francesco Sforza received a warm recommendation from Filelfo not to let such a man pass on elsewhere.¹⁷²

Some of Filelfo's earliest pupils remained at Milan where they took a prominent part in the dissemination of humanism among the

younger generation of the middle classes. Mattia da Trevi¹⁷³ had been Filelfo's pupil in Florence. By Francesco Sforza he had been appointed tutor of Sforza Secondo with whom he came to Milan in 1450.¹⁷⁴ He was primarily interested in the paedagogical aspects of humanism. This explains why some years later he was appointed to educate Gian Galeazzo Maria Sforza, for Filelfo regarded him as singularly suited for such a task and offered his advice in the education of the young prince.¹⁷⁵

Another leading paedagogue of Milan and ex-pupil of Filelfo was Baldo Martorelli.¹⁷⁶ He had been appointed to supervise the studies of Ippolita Sforza for whom he wrote several orations.¹⁷⁷ When in 1465 she was to marry Alfonso, duke of Calabria, Martorelli followed her to Naples for the young princess did not want to part with a tutor who had so much shaped her early life. Filelfo had a very high regard for this ex-pupil with whom he frequently exchanged books,¹⁷⁸ and from whom he received information from Naples after 1465. It was Baldo Martorelli who reestablished relations between Filelfo and the Neapolitan court in 1474 after Filelfo had convinced himself in 1467 that with the death of Antonio Panormita the court of Naples had relapsed completely into barbarism.¹⁷⁹

Another educator and tutor, though not a pupil of Filelfo, was Giorgio Valagussa.¹⁸⁰ Filelfo had helped him to find employment in Milan when Valagussa had arrived from Ferrara where he had frequented the school of Guarino. The young humanist showed the utmost deference to the famous poet, whom he asked for his judgement as to whether he had a greater aptitude for verse or prose.¹⁸¹ From Filelfo's side only one epigram to Valagussa has survived.¹⁸² But since Valagussa was a close friend of Filelfo's son Xenophon and since he was given the responsibility of educating, at least temporarily, some of

Francesco Sforza's children, namely Lodovico Maria and Ascanio, the court poet certainly kept a favourable eye on him, for, as has already become apparent, the appointments of teachers, professors and other humanists in Milan depended very largely on Filelfo's recommendations.

It was essential for Filelfo to foster good relations with Fazino da Fabriano,¹⁸³ keeper of the duke's library at Pavia. Fazino was both influential at the court of Francesco Sforza¹⁸⁴ and extremely useful in that he could occasionally lend some rare book to the humanists at Pavia or at Milan. His reclassification of the ducal library elicited particular praise from Filelfo.¹⁸⁵ The dismissal of the librarian by Galeazzo Maria Sforza in 1468 provoked a very sharp reaction from Filelfo who clearly sensed this was a threatening precedent for a new policy in regard to humanism and literature at Milan.¹⁸⁶

In Filelfo's letter to Fazino da Fabraino in which the congratulation on the new inventory of the library at Pavia is contained we find Buonaccursio da Pisa mentioned for the first time.¹⁸⁷ From other references Buonaccursio emerges as an old friend and pupil of Filelfo who learnt Greek at Milan during the 1450s and was to become a leading personality in the early stages of the Milanese printing industry.¹⁸⁸ With Filelfo he was linked by respect, gratitude and a close personal understanding. He sent Filelfo gifts in kind frequently, and Filelfo sent him later a long treatise on Latin orthography in which neither Lorenzo Valla nor Giovanni Tortelli escaped without some harsh strictures.¹⁸⁹

Buonaccursio da Pisa is a representative of the younger generation of humanists at Milan that emerged during the last decade of Filelfo's life and substantially shaped the cultural life of the court of Lodovico il Moro. In this context it is sufficient to present briefly four other personalities of this group in order to complete the sketch

of the Milanese background to Filelfo's career.

Giacomo Antiquario¹⁹⁰ came to Milan in 1471/1472 having been invited by Bartolomeo Calco, presumably upon the prompting of Filelfo who had maintained very close contacts with Antiquario since 1468. The humanist from Perugia displayed a deep and sincere admiration for the 'doyen' of Milanese humanism. He asked Filelfo often for advice¹⁹¹ and proved one of the most loyal and generous friends to help Filelfo in financial straits right up to 1481.¹⁹²

Piattino Piatti¹⁹³ does not appear among the recipients of Filelfo's letters or poetry, but since one letter written by him to Filelfo survives he ought to be mentioned. At the end of 1475 Piatti, the younger son of Giorgio Piatti and therefore brother of Teodoro Piatti who both numbered amongst Filelfo's closest friends, approached Filelfo with the demand to intercede on his behalf with the duke,¹⁹⁴ for in the preceding year Piatti had been banished from Milan. Filelfo's letters to the young poet who bore evidently the Filelfian stamp in his poetry may be lost; it is certainly inconceivable that Filelfo should not have answered at all to such a request. Perhaps the bulk of these letters falls into those years for which no Latin letters of Filelfo are preserved.

Like Buonaccursio da Pisa, Gabriel Pavero Fontana and Giorgio Merula frequented Filelfo's lessons in the mid-1450s. The former, born at Piacenza,¹⁹⁵ gave a document of his devotion to the master in 1455 in describing the wedding ceremonies at Ferrara.¹⁹⁶ In 1461 we find him dining and discussing with Filelfo,¹⁹⁷ and in 1471 he is mentioned as tutor of the younger son of Nicodemo Tranchadini.¹⁹⁸ Filelfo helped him with advice,¹⁹⁹ he wrote to him when staying at Rome²⁰⁰ and in 1476 he recommended him very strongly to Federigo da Montefeltre and Federigo Gonzaga as an excellent tutor for their

sons.²⁰¹ In the fierce dispute between Filelfo and Giorgio Merula, Gabriel Pavera Fontana came down on Filelfo's side as a stout henchman.

Giorgio Merula²⁰² has preserved for us his earlier respect for Filelfo in the preface to his edition of Columella's and Cato's writings 'De re rustica': 'Whenever Francesco Filelfo who was my first teacher in literature at Milan was asked by his pupils - and as he was affable and kind by nature, he encouraged them to ask frequently - he affirmed only such things of which he was certain, basing himself always on the authority of Latin and Greek texts. And if something was either not clear enough or if it did not come to his mind in that moment, a man of such eminence did not hesitate to turn over the pages of the authors, or, if he was too occupied, he sent young students to the library indicating the passage where he believed the topic in question to be dealt with and explained. Sometimes even, when he had pronounced an incorrect opinion in interpreting the authors and when he had learnt of a different opinion, be it through a textual conjecture or through someone else, even if that was a rival, he admitted frankly that his own opinion had been defeated by the exposition of a different sense.'²⁰³ Filelfo had recommended his brilliant pupil to Florence, Mantua and Venice and received with particular care those recommended to him by Merula;²⁰⁴ he read what Merula wrote and encouraged him to continue in his career.²⁰⁵ Giorgio Merula in his turn returned his master's concern by collecting books, primarily Greek ones, for Filelfo's library.²⁰⁶ But as a rule, among the humanists extreme reactions lay always close together; there was but a thin dividing line between admiration and obloquy, between flattering friendship and spiteful denunciations. In the case of Filelfo and Merula, whose ambitious cravings for

recognition were particularly inflammable, it was clear that the slightest suspicion of disloyalty could easily turn friendship into its opposite. In 1478 the two humanists were still on friendly terms. In his counterattack against Domizio Calderini, Merula justified his quotations from Filelfo on the grounds that Filelfo was an authority on grammar equal to the ancients.²⁰⁷ Merula's reaction was different, however, when Filelfo himself criticized some of his writings. In 1480 Filelfo wrote to Bernardo Giustinian and Francesco Diedi dropping some critical remarks about Merula's work on the Battle of Scodra, printed in 1474, in which Merula had preferred the form 'Turcae' to 'Turci'.²⁰⁸ This slightly pedantic remark was passed on to Merula at Venice. Merula felt offended by this condescending arrogance and he vented his anger in a letter to Bartolomeo Calco, now ~~private~~ *ducal* secretary to Lodovico Sforza.²⁰⁹ The letter to Bartolomeo Calco, who was by now the most influential personality at the Milanese court, could not be kept secret. A scandal could no longer be avoided. Filelfo retorted on 7 October 1480 in a letter to Benedetto Aliprando in which he combined in the fashionable manner factual arguments with gross personal insults:²¹⁰ Merula, now nicknamed Chezergius and Merdula, was castigated for stupidity, arrogance and ingratitude; the picture was completed by charges of gluttony and continuous inebriation. The letter reached Merula on 30 November 1480 through Pietro Figino. A fortnight later Merula took up the challenge and sent a letter to Gian Giacomo Ghilini accusing Filelfo of obstinate narrow-mindedness, complacent ignorance, unbridled lecherousness and drunkenness.²¹¹ Filelfo's name was turned into 'Philepsius' - a tit-for-tat to revenge the offensive 'Merdula'. A long catalogue of mistakes that had been committed by Filelfo in his works was attached, and Merula excused himself for ever having spoken favourably of that

'rude monster'.²¹² Filelfo was taken by surprise: he had not expected such a fierce invective. He had trusted that his authority would be sufficient to overawe the rebellious pupil and to browbeat him into submission. Also, he was too much preoccupied with arranging his transfer to Florence for the next year. This is why the task of answering Merula devolved upon Gabriel Pavero Fontana. In a long letter to Bernardo Giustinian, written on 1 April 1481, he made Giorgio Merula answer his interrogation in a fictitious dialogue.²¹³ With Latin verse interspersed to show off his skill in poetry, the conversation is dull, jerking and totally unmotivated. The 'Merlanica prima' - the title implies that more was to come - belongs definitely to the poorest products of humanist writings of that period. The language is stilted and affected, Merula is made to look like an imbecile fool, and after a brief defence of Filelfo in which Fontana wants to make the reader believe that the women kept in Filelfo's house were the 'Muses' and the 'Graces' from whom the poet drew poetical inspiration,²¹⁴ he goes on to refute each single charge made by Merula. But he does it so unconvincingly that nobody could ever be impressed. Filelfo himself resumed his pen in this feud only a few weeks before his death. On 4 June 1481 he sent an epigram on Merula to Geronimo Squarzafico who had also been born in Alessandria and seems to have been for that reason Merula's chief rival at Venice.²¹⁵ This invective is significantly the last document in the life of Filelfo in which the hostility with Merula was only the last link in an uninterrupted chain of squabbles and invectives. As an irony of fate, a year later Giorgio Merula was appointed to succeed Filelfo at Milan.

The outlines of Filelfo's social and intellectual environment would be incomplete if Antonio Averlino, called Filarete, were not

mentioned. Since the time of Filippo Maria Visconti, Filarete was counted by Filelfo among his very close friends.²¹⁶ Obviously the architect found the knowledgeable humanist a valuable source of information about ancient architecture. Filelfo probably suggested and discussed with Filarete many of the architectural principles and details enshrined in the 'Sforzinda' project.²¹⁷ Up to 1466 there are many documents to illustrate the close association between Filelfo and Filarete which adds characteristically to the versatility of Filelfo's wide ranging knowledge.²¹⁸

IV. FRANCESCO FILELFO'S RELATIONS WITH OTHER CENTRES OF HUMANISTIC STUDIES

1. Venice

From Padua where Filelfo had been appointed to teach rhetoric at the age of twenty he had been called to Vicenza; at Vicenza he had received the generous offer from some Venetian patricians to go to Constantinople in order to learn Greek.¹ On 23 July 1420 he had been made an honorary citizen of Venice. Soon afterwards he had set out for the East as the secretary of the Venetian Bailli at Constantinople.²

On his return in 1427 Filelfo had hoped to be greeted with a jubilant welcome. He had been promised an extraordinary salary³ so that he had reason to believe that Venice wanted him to start a school of humanistic studies on the lagoon. All these hopes and projects were shattered, however, as a result of the plague which swept Venice in that winter. But even so the stay at Venice was a useful stepping stone for Bologna and Florence. Filelfo's humanistic formation was therefore of an exclusively Venetian making. If he appeared as a promising bright teacher in 1428, acclaimed and honoured by the foremost protagonists of humanism in Italy, Filelfo had to thank Venice and her university at Padua for that.

In later years Filelfo always remained deeply grateful to Venice retaining strong emotional ties that bound him to the city of Saint Mark. To his son Gian Mario he wrote: 'The Venetians are the most polite and generous of all peoples. They are of such a type, endowed with so much greatness and gratefulness in their hearts, that even serving them means, so to speak, complete freedom.... You will settle there, if you are prudent, and your stay will be undisturbed and most fruitful.'⁴ At Bologna and Florence Filelfo received alluring

offers from Venice,⁵ and in April 1439 he confessed to Giovanni Toscanella that if conditions at Milan were not to live up to his expectations he would always be free to go to Venice.⁶ Even two years after Filelfo's settlement in Milan a new attempt was initiated to recall him back to Venice.⁷ Perhaps it was felt that with increasing hostility between Milan and Venice Filelfo could be a potentially dangerous man at the Visconti court. But in this conflict Filelfo distinguished sharply between politics and personal loyalties: even when Venice and Milan were poised on the brink of war he tried to visit his friends in Venice,⁸ he reassured them that he would never allow war to interfere with his studies,⁹ and he deplored the fact that a military confrontation made reliable communications impossible.¹⁰

Later in his life Filelfo considered seriously moving back to Venice as he grew increasingly frustrated over the perennial shortage of money in Milan. In December 1463 Bessarion, then legate in Venice, let Filelfo know that the Venetians were considering entrusting the official historiography of their city to the author of the 'Sforzias'. Filelfo's demands on this occasion were however so exorbitant - he asked for a salary of 1,200 ducats per annum - that this project was soon abandoned.¹¹ Eight years later Filelfo could no longer dictate the terms; he had to be glad if he found any alternative employment at all. In 1471, when he was looking all over Italy for a secure and honorable position, he also approached Venice as well as Bologna, Ferrara and Rome.¹² Certainly from 1473 onwards Filelfo's correspondence reflects a tendency to intensify relations with Venice.¹³ On at least three occasions the old humanist tried to open negotiations with Venice in order to return there. The first attempt was cut short by the sudden invitation from Rome in 1474 which Filelfo still preferred to any position in Venice; the second one fizzled out in

courteous but evasive answers from Venice; the last initiative was rendered unnecessary by the invitation from Florence and Filelfo's subsequent death.¹⁴ Venice, in the 1470s a flourishing centre of scholars like Giorgio Merula, was no longer interested in a humanist of the old generation who had little to offer to those who were eager to learn new philological methods. In these last efforts to recuperate some of the popular admiration which he had once commanded at Venice, it must have dawned sorely upon Filelfo that he was outliving his age. The approaches to the disciplines making up a humanist's curriculum had shifted, new interests and methods had rapidly been developed, while the aged humanist remained solidly entrenched in the learning and the tastes of the 1420s and 1430s.¹⁵

Another aspect of Filelfo's attachment to Venice consists in the elaborate letters he used to send to almost every new doge congratulating him on his election and exhorting him to pursue the military efforts against the Turks with all vigour.¹⁶

The credit for Filelfo's training was due particularly to two Venetian patricians who dominated the cultural life of their city during the first half of the fifteenth century: Leonardo Giustinian and Francesco Barbaro. Both having been enthusiastic pupils of Guarino, they tried their hands at translations from Plutarch and worked tirelessly to disseminate the interest in classical antiquity. Both held high office in Venice and extended their patronage to a large number of humanists. Jointly they espoused the project of sending Francesco Filelfo to Constantinople; they certainly paid for most of the expenses, providing Filelfo with money to buy rare manuscripts at Constantinople. Their aim may have been to give, through Filelfo, the same impetus to humanistic studies at Venice as Manuel Chrysoloras had done some thirty years previously at Florence. If

these had been their hopes, they were soon completely shattered:

Filelfo left Venice in bitter disappointment, and the general indifference among the other leading families in the city delayed the foundation of a public chair of Greek and rhetoric until 1460, and even then public teaching, when compared with private tutoring, was very weak and insignificant at Venice.¹⁷

Leonardo Giustinian¹⁸ was undisputedly the most eminent personality in the cultural life at Venice in the early fifteenth century. Despite his heavy involvement in administration he found sufficient leisure to translate from the Greek and to write poetry in Italian. He was the first to discover the talents of Filelfo and to urge the proposal of sending the young man to Constantinople. Filelfo expressed a singular gratitude whenever he spoke of Leonardo Giustinian;¹⁹ in a poem to Bernardo Giustinian condoling with him on his father's death, Filelfo stressed that if it had not been for the generosity of Leonardo he would never have been able to learn Greek.²⁰ Before his return to Venice Filelfo had sent in advance some cases full of books to Leonardo. But since there were some outstanding debts on Filelfo's part Leonardo refused to hand back these cases, either retaining them as securities or regarding them as his own property since the money for buying these books had been advanced by himself. The dispute over these books created some tension between protector and protégé which was inherited even by Leonardo's son, but although Filelfo felt genuinely wronged in this affair he never changed his tone of reverence and respectful gratitude when writing to Leonardo.²¹ Regardless of this issue Leonardo Giustinian was Filelfo's closest friend in 1427-1428. He had made the promise that a salary of 500 ducats was obtainable at Venice.²² With Filelfo's arrival at Florence relations cooled off noticeably. Early in 1431 Filelfo had to write

to Leonardo reassuring him that despite malicious rumours their friendship ought to be as strong as ever.²³ But the gradual alienation between the two humanists could not be stemmed artificially. As Filelfo made more and more enemies at Florence by being too much involved in party struggles, Leonardo Giustinian became increasingly influenced by the rather negative judgments of Ambrogio Traversari. It is true, Filelfo maintained a regular correspondence with the Venetian patrician, but the alienation between the two friends is well expressed in a letter sent by Giustinian to Filelfo in which the old protector dispels any doubts of the Milanese court poet having fallen out of favour. At the same time, however, Filelfo was reminded that he ought to write something of intrinsic worth rather than waste time and resources on outrageous pamphlets against the Medici.²⁴ The letter was courteous, but cool, yet it served its purpose: a year later Filelfo sent Leonardo Giustinian the first 'Convivium' which Leonardo returned with most flattering remarks.²⁵ After the end of 1443 nothing is known about the relations between Filelfo and Leonardo who died on 10 November 1446; Filelfo always remembered him as a unique benefactor.²⁶

Leonardo's son Bernardo Giustinian²⁷ had been taught by Filelfo in 1420.²⁸ He now became the man whom Filelfo regarded as his most powerful friend in Venice.²⁹ Filelfo wrote to him very frequently recommending friends, asking for information about Venetian politics and occasionally complaining that the Venetian statesman was slack in answering letters.³⁰ Later Bernardo received the first printed copies of Filelfo's 'Satires' and of the translation of Xenophon's 'Cyropaedia',³¹ but this made apparently little impression upon him since he continued to show a certain aloofness towards Filelfo whom he probably regarded as too superficial and vain. In fact, Filelfo's

uncontrolled antics after the death of Pius II seem to have severed all correspondence for an interval of five years, at the end of which it was patched up only by a long and formal letter on the part of Filelfo.³²

The other friend and protector of the young Filelfo was Francesco Barbaro.³³ With him, too, Filelfo had a dispute over some cases of books deposited with him very much like that with Leonardo Giustinian.³⁴ Generally speaking, the development of the relations between Francesco Barbaro and Filelfo followed closely the pattern of those between Leonardo Giustinian and Filelfo. The latter's behaviour at Florence disillusioned Barbaro quickly as to the true character of his protégé.³⁵ Yet he remained friendly in his correspondence with Filelfo and attributed great importance to persuading his friend to leave the court of Milan.³⁶ In 1444, when he came to Milan as ambassador, he also visited Filelfo and apparently promised to return the disputed books.³⁷ In the only surviving letter to Filelfo, Francesco Barbaro pledges his help in finding a position for Filelfo, but simultaneously he shows himself highly annoyed at the Milanese humanist's obtrusive importunities.³⁸ Filelfo for his part entertained an exalted esteem for Barbaro,³⁹ and when Barbaro died in 1454 he wrote to Pietro Tommasi: 'I recently heard the most mournful news after the death of that excellent man Leonardo Giustinian, namely that Francesco Barbaro, the paragon of old dignity and learning, had died ... I know there is an almost infinite number of grave and learned men at Venice, but I don't know anybody else there who could be regarded as profoundly learned in both Greek and Latin.'⁴⁰

With Francesco's son Zaccaria Barbaro⁴¹ Filelfo exchanged few letters; most of them concerned only the books which Filelfo still claimed were his.

The correspondence with Ermolao Barbaro,⁴² Francesco's nephew, for whom his uncle had secured the bishopric of Verona, was not much more intimate either. On an embassy to France, Ermolao passed through Milan in 1460 and on both his outward journey and on his return he was visited by Filelfo.⁴³ Filelfo complained to him about Antonio Beccaria⁴⁴ who, when leaving the service of the duke of Milan in order to become secretary to Ermolao Barbaro, had taken away a copy of Plutarch's 'Lives' from Filelfo's library.⁴⁵ Somewhat disappointingly the entire correspondence between the bishop of Verona and the court poet at Milan is exclusively concerned with this copy of Plutarch.

Pietro Tommasi was Filelfo's third close friend among the first generation of Venetian humanists.⁴⁶ Trained in medicine he never attained a predominant position comparable to that of Leonardo Giustinian or Francesco Barbaro in the cultural life of his city. Filelfo regarded him as a reliable friend⁴⁷ whose chief merit consisted in the reconciliation between Filelfo and Poggio which he effected.⁴⁸ This is why in 1453 Filelfo sent Pietro Tommasi a copy of the letter addressed to Lorenzo Valla and to Poggio, adding jokingly that it should have been Tommasi's duty to reconcile the two fighting humanists.⁴⁹ As a rule, the numerous letters written by Filelfo to the Venetian physician contain little information of relevance. Pietro Tommasi received copies of all the works Filelfo wrote in that period, he helped to spread Filelfo's reputation, but in the letters little more can be found than trivial current affairs.

Other Venetians who were in touch with Filelfo before the middle of the century included men like Febo Capella,⁵⁰ a close friend of Francesco Barbaro, Federico Cornelio,⁵¹ Marco Lippomanni⁵² and Daniele Vetturi,⁵³ the last two of whom had studied together with Filelfo under Gasparino Barzizza at Padua.

When Filelfo bewailed the death of Francesco Barbaro as an irreparable loss for scholarship, he was only partially right. For in the 1450s a second generation of Venetian humanists emerged who could easily stand up to the high standards set by Leonardo Giustinian and Francesco Barbaro. This generation was headed by Bernardo Giustinian and Lodovico Foscarini.⁵⁴ Filelfo had met Foscarini, who belonged to one of the most eminent families of Venice, at the congress of Mantua in 1459. The Venetian ambassador was impressed by the eloquence of the Milanese court poet, and his admiration was fanned by a long letter calling for a crusade against the Turks which Filelfo sent him in 1463.⁵⁵ Even the repulsive events of 1464-1465 after the death of Pius II, who had been lovingly venerated by Foscarini, could hardly shake the firm friendship between Filelfo and Foscarini.⁵⁶ Lodovico Foscarini, like Bernardo Giustinian, combined a successful diplomatic and political career, which brought him within an ace of the dogado, with a keen interest in humanist literature. Foscarini was perhaps too easily dazzled by external and formal brilliance. He covered Filelfo with the most extraordinary praise which the addressee rejected with not always quite sincere modesty.⁵⁷ Filelfo in his turn showed himself concerned with Foscarini's precarious health, congratulated him on the successful stages of his career and occasionally interpreted a passage from some classical poet. Needless to say, it was Foscarini to whom Filelfo turned whenever he felt like returning to Venice.⁵⁸

Little is known about Giacomo Antonio Marcello's attitude to Filelfo. That he should have turned to the Milanese poet in 1461 asking for a literary memorial for his son Valerio suggests that Filelfo had a unique reputation at Venice, for it seems that the first direct contacts between the two had only been made a year previously.⁶⁰

The detailed account of the history of the Marcello family given in the 'Consolatio' proves that Filelfo was well informed about the life of Giacomo Antonio Marcello. The 'Consolatio' contributed more to disseminating Filelfo's fame than any other work he wrote and thus his name became specially linked with that of the Marcello family of Venice.⁶¹

Another man to show admiration for Francesco Filelfo was Niccolò Canale.⁶² Their friendship took an interesting turn in 1470 when on 12 July 1470 Chalkis (Negroponte) fell to the Turks. Niccolò Canale was commander of the Venetian fleet in the Aegean at that time and on his return he was accused of negligence and banished.⁶³ This sentence provoked the most vigorous protests from Filelfo, who gave a rare example of courage on this occasion. Without regard for any opportunist considerations he came down without hesitation on the side of the wronged admiral. In a rather aggressive letter to Bernardo Giustinian he pointed out that the fault lay not so much with the commander of the fleet but rather with the Senate's internal dissensions which had prevented reinforcements from reaching the Aegean in time.⁶⁴ When the verdict had been pronounced Filelfo wrote another strong worded letter to Lodovico Foscari.⁶⁵ Even two years later Filelfo defended Niccolò Canale, although he himself ceased writing to the banished patrician.⁶⁶

Finally Marco Aurelio,⁶⁷ Venetian diplomat and humanist, completes the picture of the important friends of Filelfo at Venice. Aurelio had entered Filelfo's life comparatively late, but during the last decade before Filelfo's death Marco Aurelio was perhaps the friend nearest to the heart of the aging poet. When in 1475 Filelfo lost two sons and when a year later his third wife died, Marco Aurelio received the first and most personal accounts of these misfortunes.⁶⁸

A large number of other Venetians appear in Filelfo's correspondence, like Bernardo and Bonifazio Bembo,⁶⁹ Domenico and Geronimo Barbadico,⁷⁰ Marco Martinengo⁷¹ and Paolo Moroceno,⁷² but none of these maintained contacts with Filelfo for a longer period.

Venice was a centre of humanistic studies different in character from Florence but hardly less important, if the university of Padua is regarded as an integral part of Venetian cultural life. Quickly increasing wealth and a dominant political position in European politics called for a new manifestation in art and literature which, even if it was never nearly so profound as in Florence, shaped substantially the development of humanism and Renaissance art in Northern Italy. Particularly with the introduction of printing, Venice could boast an unrivalled leadership in humanistic studies, and in this field Filelfo remained popular with Venetian printers well into the sixteenth century.⁷³

2. Bologna

Francesco Filelfo had his first resounding successes in academic life at Bologna in 1428-1429.¹ He had been recommended there by Guarino, and the impression left by his speeches and lectures was such that the university of Bologna tried persistently to recall him after he had transferred to Florence.² It took ten years until Filelfo returned to Bologna, but although he had made it clear that he was not going to stay for longer than six months in 1439, he left in fact after only three months of teaching,³ leaving behind a reputation for unreliability and arrogance. From Milan Filelfo tried to explain why he had had to leave, blaming Bologna's perpetual political

instability for his premature departure.⁴ Still a large number of powerful friends remained favourably disposed to Filelfo so that in 1441 a new invitation was sent out. But Filelfo was now too firmly attached to Milan and refused to consider seriously any alternative for the time being.⁵ However, seven years later during the turmoils of the Ambrosian Republic the political instability of Bologna appeared by far preferable to the upheavals and the famine at Milan.⁶

Both in 1453 on his journey to Naples and in 1469 on his journey to Siena Filelfo stopped in Bologna to meet friends.⁷ Up to 1467 Filelfo's closest friend in Bologna was Alberto Zancario.⁸ They had met in 1428, and at once a genial relationship sprang up which proved to be Filelfo's strongest link with Bologna for forty years.⁹ Zancario was slightly older than Filelfo and an uncritical admirer of Filelfo's poetical genius. He made highly effective propaganda for Filelfo at Bologna, he sent his own two sons Enoch and Geronimo to Milan to be educated by Filelfo, and the fabulous offer of 450 ducats for six months in 1438 was probably chiefly due to Zancario's influence.¹⁰ Filelfo repaid this devotion by keeping Zancario informed about his own private life at Milan, by trying to obtain administrative appointments for the Bolognese lawyer and by sending every new work first to Zancario at Bologna.¹¹ Towards the end of Zancario's life some estrangement became apparent in the measure in which Zancario addicted himself to a mystical religiosity which provoked Filelfo's sarcastic comments.¹²

Another eminent lawyer in the university of Bologna, who was in close contact with Filelfo, was Bornio Sala.¹³ Their acquaintance, too, went back to 1428,¹⁴ and although no letters from Filelfo survive for the last two decades in Sala's life, their relationship seems to have lasted down to Sala's death in 1469.¹⁵ Bornio Sala helped to

copy rare manuscripts for Filelfo, he became godfather to one of Filelfo's children, and in a letter of 1464 Filelfo spoke with marked respect of this representative of the humanist current at Bologna.¹⁶

For the later years of Filelfo's life Alberto Parisi¹⁷ became the most important man to maintain a connection between Filelfo and Bologna. They had met in 1453¹⁸ and in subsequent years the chancellor of the governing body of the Bolognese university turned out to be one of the most regular correspondents of Filelfo. More than twenty-five letters addressed to him survive. Simultaneously Alberto Parisi was also exchanging letters with Poggio and other humanists. Filelfo's letters to Alberto Parisi are the most interesting ones in the entire collection of his correspondence. A number of philological problems are explained in them, ranging from the etymology of the word 'hero' and an extract from Plato's 'Cratylus' to a commentary on Ovid and Juvenal.¹⁹ Even while he was in mourning for his wife Filelfo would not restrain himself from writing a lengthy letter to his Bolognese friend in order to answer a question.²⁰ One topic deserves particular attention: in the debate about the origins of the Italian 'Vulgare' Poggio Bracciolini had drawn attention to the names of certain fish caught in the Tiber, since their Italian names were clearly derived from the antecedent Latin names.²¹ Filelfo had discussed and refuted Poggio's theories in two letters to Buonaccorso da Pisa and to Nicodemo Tranchedini.²² But a year later the theme was broached again by Alberto Parisi, and Filelfo wrote to him two further letters expounding in great detail why he differed from Poggio on this issue.²³

Through Alberto Parisi, Filelfo kept in touch with the entire humanistic circle at Bologna. The letters to Parisi are full of greetings and regards to Baveria,²⁴ Giovanni Garzoni,²⁵ Luchino Trotti,²⁶ Galeazzo Marescotti,²⁷ Bernardo Moretti²⁸ and Benedetto

Morandi,²⁹ some of whom had presumably been Filelfo's pupils. An impressive list of people connected with Filelfo at Bologna can be found in the letter to Alberto Parisi dated 31 October 1464, which contains the rebuttal of the criticisms made by Galeotto Marzio da Narni against Filelfo's 'Sforzias'.³⁰ Alberto Parisi had circulated the 'Sforzias' at Bologna submitting the epic also to Galeotto Marzio who was then teaching at Bologna. The upshot was a fierce diatribe by the truculent Marzio who attacked the poem on the grounds of dullness and lack of motivation, denouncing at the same time a long list of grammatical blunders and errors in prosody. He concluded with the blunt remark that the epic was basically not more than a diluted imitation of Vergil and Ovid. Filelfo replied to these taunts in the usual condescending way laying particular stress on the justification of his prosody and grammar. Undaunted by this counter-invective Galeotto Marzio repeated his accusations in a second invective, but apart from reiterating the judgement that the 'Sforzias' was stuffed with trivialities the controversy got hopelessly bogged down by marginal technicalities. Filelfo did not answer this second attack. At that time he was probably too preoccupied with the dilemma into which his slanderous libels against Pius II had led him.³¹ But at Bologna the repercussions of this scandal were still felt in 1465.³² Maybe this controversy in which the majority of the humanist community at Bologna sided with Filelfo was responsible for Galeotto Marzio's speedy departure for Hungary in 1465.

A great disappointment for Filelfo came in 1471.³³ As it became clear that he was no longer 'persona grata' to the duke of Milan, negotiations were started with Bologna on Filelfo's behalf by Cicco Simonetta and Fabrizio Elfiteo. The ducal ambassador at Bologna, Gerardo Cerruti, was informed that Galeazzo Maria Sforza was weary of

the current expenses which the presence of the court poet imposed on his treasury, but that it seemed advisable to keep Filelfo in a place where he would still be amenable to Milanese control. Filelfo's outbursts against Cosimo de' Medici and Pius II made such a proviso imperative despite Filelfo's assurances of his loyalty to the Sforzas. Giovanni Bentivoglio was approached and Francesco Gonzaga, then cardinal legate for Bologna, was persuaded to support the scheme.³⁴ A letter was circulated to the governors of the university explaining that Filelfo's precarious health made a change in climate necessary and that it was with the deepest regret that the duke reluctantly bowed to the necessity of granting leave to his beloved court poet. This was, of course, a flimsy pretext designed to hide the real reasons, but in its style and purpose it was characteristic of Renaissance diplomacy. It was clearly understood that Filelfo would never accept any offer unless the salary was 'honourable', that is to say not inferior to what he had been entitled at Milan, and that Bologna would be unlikely to make such an offer if it became evident that Filelfo was regarded more or less as a nuisance at Milan. At Bologna people probably saw through this ruse and unfortunately Alberto Parisi was not powerful enough on this occasion to guide decisions in the desired direction. For although Filelfo was elected and enrolled among the professors for the coming academic year, his salary was fixed at 300 ducats annually, so that there was no advantage for Filelfo in transferring to Bologna.³⁵ In burning anger Filelfo wrote to Alberto Parisi: 'You have appointed stupid idiots to govern the university of Bologna. I have nothing in common with them.'³⁶ This was language of which even Cicco Simonetta disapproved. Trying to soothe tempers Cicco declared to Gerardo Cerruti: 'The letter which Filelfo wrote appears to me neither appropriate nor befitting; but,

as I said, we have to be sorry for him, for partly on account of his need, partly because of his age he is now out of the game.'³⁷ But, as usual in the world of humanists, tempers that ran high at the moment soon cooled off afterwards. Filelfo's contacts with his Bolognese friends don't appear to have suffered from this episode, and in 1475 on his way back from Rome Filelfo stayed again at Bologna for two days.³⁸

3. Florence

Francesco Filelfo's entire life was determined by his experiences at Florence between 1429 and 1434. The successes in lecturing in that famous city reinforced Filelfo's belief in his own superiority to all other contemporary humanists; the rivalry with Carlo Marsuppini and Niccolò Niccoli, at first smouldering, but then openly pursued with all possible intrigues and crafty strategems, confirmed his paranoic suspiciousness; the clash with Cosimo de' Medici finally excluded Filelfo from the most active centre of humanistic studies and also for a long time barred his entrance into the papal curia. When he was finally recalled to the Arno city, he had only one more month to live. Throughout his life Filelfo recurrently expressed the desire to be in Florence; Florence and Rome always appeared to him as the crowning stages of any humanist's career. One may speculate what turn Filelfo's intellectual development might have taken if he had been guided in his poetical endeavours by a firm taste for serious investigation and unpretentious lyrical poetry, as it was prevalent in the Medici entourage, rather than by a mediocre preference for stale epics and bombastic panegyrics which characterised the tastes of the Milanese court society. Particularly, the interest of the dukes in

humanistic studies was virtually non-existent. If Filelfo had not fallen among the enemies of Cosimo de' Medici, he might never have set foot in Milan.

When Filelfo arrived at Florence in 1429¹ he soon attached himself closely to the ruling faction of patricians headed by Rinaldo degli Albizzi. This party adherence was largely determined by Palla Strozzi who took a leading part in that faction. Filelfo felt deeply obliged to him not only because Palla Strozzi had been responsible for Filelfo's appointment in the 'Studio', but also because Palla Strozzi was the sole aristocrat to have made a serious study of Greek. Leonardo Bruni's detachment from the Medici camp as a result of the chagrin Niccoli still bore against him even after the formal reconciliation in 1425² may have pushed Filelfo completely into identifying himself with the Albizzi faction. Throughout his life Filelfo remained always a stout conservative, deeply distrustful of any political aspirations of the lower ranks of the professional classes which he believed to be the driving interests behind Cosimo de' Medici. As in Milan during the Ambrosian Republic, Filelfo feared that no protection would be available from merchants and lawyers who did not share the traditional way of life of the nobility. Such a partisan attitude was bound to strain relations with Cosimo de' Medici. After very friendly beginnings³ the year 1430 brought a profound change in their relationship. In the growing antagonism between Filelfo and Marsuppini, Cosimo tended to support Marsuppini and therefore became suspected of complicity in various plots by Filelfo, who resented above all Cosimo's wealth.⁴ Cosimo's brother Lorenzo did not improve the situation by demonstrating bluntly his personal aversion to Filelfo.⁵ In 1432 the polarisation continued: civil strife did not stop at the gates of the 'Studio' and several tricks

were used to get rid of the teachers who supported the Albizzi faction.⁶ Certainly Lorenzo de' Medici played a rather dubious role in these attempts to politicise the 'Studio';⁷ more important, however, was Filelfo's firm conviction - whether right or wrong we cannot tell - that Cosimo himself lurked as the initiator behind all these sinister machinations.⁸ Filelfo's indignation was justified at least insofar as Cosimo must have known about what was going on and yet declined to restrain Marsuppini. The outcome was that in 1433 Filelfo selfrighteously attacked Carlo Marsuppini and Niccolò Niccoli, and a fortnight later Cosimo himself was the target of a philippic.⁹ If Filelfo had presented himself as a second Cicero in these letters, the parallel was continued in a more gruesome fashion when a few weeks later an attempt to assassinate Filelfo was only narrowly foiled by his quick reaction.¹⁰ What was more natural than to regard the odious, all-powerful Cosimo as playing the part of Mark Antony in this drama?¹¹ These events, which preceded immediately the incarceration of Cosimo, must be borne in mind when passing judgement on Filelfo's outbursts of hatred in September of the same year.¹² His demand for the execution of Cosimo was the expression of his desire for revenge, and in predicting that, if Cosimo was not destroyed, the same means that would allow him to escape would also allow him to return, Filelfo was more far-sighted than most of the other aristocrats, as he himself pointed out later in a letter to Onofrio Strozzi.¹³ Worse things were to come: When two years later another assassination attempt on Filelfo was discovered, the humanist's rage broke out of the channels of purely literary invective into full retaliation. He himself sent a man to Florence with orders to kill Carlo Marsuppini, Geronimo Broccardo and Lorenzo de' Medici.¹⁴ The man was apprehended and forced to confess. As a result Filelfo was sentenced to forfeit

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his tongue should he ever set foot on Florentine territory again.

With hindsight it is too easy to take sides with Cosimo de' Medici in this episode.¹⁶ In the light of the available evidence, it is difficult to blame Filelfo more than his adversaries. Lorenzo de' Medici was certainly somehow involved in the plot hatched by Geronimo Broccardo, and if Filelfo was oversuspicious in regard to Cosimo we must not let our knowledge of later successes colour the picture of Cosimo in 1433 and 1434. Nothing indicated at that time that his bid for power would really mark the end in a long period of turbulent party strife. His conduct gave no assurance that his predominance would be in any way better than that of Rinaldo degli Albizzi, and in abetting dubious ruses of his brother and of Carlo Marsuppini he cannot be totally exonerated from the responsibility for the violent clash with Filelfo.

No sooner had Filelfo taken refuge at Siena in 1435 than he really began to play out his role as the resurrected Cicero. He saw himself as the victimized protagonist of Florentine liberty in the face of tyrannical usurpation. His first contribution to this struggle was an invective against Cosimo and Poggio which only served, however, to lay bare Filelfo's deplorable lack of any political pathos, because the invective, following true humanistic fashion, consisted almost exclusively of the most scandalous backstairs rumours and of glaringly incredible denunciations of the most outrageous crimes.¹⁷

According to the tag 'semper aliquid haeret', Cosimo was deeply troubled by these defamations. Filelfo gloated over this reaction which was precisely what he had hoped for, and promised even more acid denigrations.¹⁸ Twice he haughtily rejected offers of a reconciliation made by Cosimo through Ambrogio Traversari: 'Let him use daggers and poison; I will fight with wit and pen. I don't desire the

friendship of Cosimo de' Medici, I despise his enmity.'¹⁹

This was the state of affairs when Filelfo's arrival at Milan and the simultaneous preparations of the Florentine 'fuorusciti' provided a new platform for propaganda. In a pompous letter the new Cicero admonished Florence not to offer any resistance to the liberators, to throw off the yoke of Cosimo and to accept the benevolent protection of the Visconti.²⁰ A similar letter, spiced with threats and pious exhortations to repent, was sent to Cosimo.²¹ At the same time Filelfo worked busily on his 'Commentationes Florentinae de exilio'. Purporting to report the conversation of Florentine noblemen on the eve of their banishment, the work was intended to be a monumental indictment of Cosimo and his party of upstarts.²² After the disaster at Anghiari Filelfo preferred not to continue this work. The course of Milanese diplomacy made it advisable not to exacerbate any further Florentine opinion.

Although in 1447 Filelfo showed himself still paranoically hostile to Cosimo de' Medici,²³ he accepted advances made through the experienced diplomat Angelo Acciaiuoli.²⁴ The death of the duke and the prospect of an eventual succession of Francesco Sforza, declared friend and ally of Cosimo, made a speedy patching up of past hostilities a matter of urgent expediency. Late in 1447 Filelfo wrote to Pietro de' Medici in terms of unaccustomed courtesy,²⁵ a few months later he urged Angelo Acciaiuoli to speed up the reconciliation.²⁶ A satire was published to prove the change in Filelfo's attitude.²⁷ But matters did not proceed as smoothly as the impatient humanist desired. Letter after letter was dispatched to Angelo Acciaiuoli, to Cosimo's children and, after Sforza's accession, to Nicodemo Tranchedini, the Milanese ambassador resident at Florence.²⁸ The duke himself was dragged personally into this campaign to get the sentence

of banishment and outlawry revoked.²⁹ Perhaps Filelfo seriously hoped that once that obstacle was removed he could return to a chair of rhetoric in Florence.³⁰ But Cosimo was now safely installed at Florence. He felt sufficiently secure that no man's abuse could in any way bespatter his reputation. He felt therefore no need to oblige an opportunist. On the occasion of his visit to Rome early in 1459 Filelfo had strongly hoped to be granted a safeconduct across Florentine territory; he had even dared to write to Cosimo about it.³¹ But all such hopes faded in face of Cosimo's adamant determination not to lift the sentence of 1436.

Filelfo got on much better with Pietro de' Medici who had attended the humanist's lectures at Florence.³² In 1433 Pietro had made a last desperate effort to avoid a total rupture between his father and Filelfo,³³ in 1447 he had been the first to whom Filelfo dared to write again,³⁴ and in the course of the 1450s cordial relations had been reestablished through Nicodemo Tranchedini.³⁵ A year before Cosimo's death Pietro became godfather to one of Filelfo's children.³⁶ But whereas Pietro showed himself very favourable to Filelfo in acting as godfather, in according him generous credit and in helping him to get a safeconduct when required,³⁷ he remained as impervious as his father to any petition of raising the banishment.³⁸ Although Filelfo now became a close friend of the Medici representatives at Milan, Pigello and Accirito Portinari,³⁹ although he appeared as a welcome guest in 1469 in the Arno city,⁴⁰ he still remained legally an outlaw there.

This situation did not change very much under Lorenzo de' Medici.⁴¹ Lorenzo showed a really singular forbearance with the waywardness of the aging humanist who showered upon him letters with well meant political advice, personal news about hopes and disappointments and,

of course, innumerable demands for money.⁴² Lorenzo became in fact the most important money lender to Filelfo in the 1470s. Not only were considerable sums of cash advanced to Filelfo through the Medici bank at Milan, more important still was Lorenzo's willingness to cover any debt Filelfo had incurred with other creditors. Lorenzo saved thus on several occasions Filelfo's library and household from being auctioned.⁴³ Filelfo in his turn worshipped Lorenzo. He sent him copies of his poetry⁴⁴ and some of the more important letters,⁴⁵ and if some of the grossly flattering phrases were but stereotypes taken from the inexhaustible courtier's reservoir, a firm basis for a sincere admiration in Filelfo cannot be denied, for Lorenzo represented the ideal ruler in his combination of political power and boundless generosity towards the artists: 'I wish it were possible for you to pierce with your eyes into my heart to see how ardent is the love I bear for your Magnificence, for then you would clearly understand that nobody lives in this life who loves you better than Filelfo.'⁴⁶ 'I am yours by a special obligation.'⁴⁷ To show his gratitude Filelfo dedicated some of his more important works to Lorenzo. A short treatise on the 'Vulgare'⁴⁸ and another one on 'Ideas'⁴⁹ - Filelfo was never slow in jumping on the bandwagon of fashionable topics - were sent as letters to Lorenzo in 1473. Obviously encouraged by the positive reception these writings had in Florence, Filelfo announced a new great project a few months later: he was to write a comprehensive work on moral philosophy.⁵⁰ But now even Lorenzo's otherwise impeccable courtesy failed in the face of Filelfo's complacent, superficial way of compiling loosely some authorities and passing such a heterogeneous mixture for an original work. Filelfo received no judgement from Lorenzo on this new work after the first parts had been submitted. An indifferent silence was under these

circumstances possibly the most condemning judgement. It appears therefore more probable that Filelfo left the work incomplete because of lack of recognition rather than because of death interrupting the author, for the fragment which comprises the first four books was finished by 1475.⁵¹ Since the work was planned to grow to ten books, Filelfo still had six years to write the remaining six books, which should not have been too difficult for him since the first four books had been composed in just over one year. Another work offered to Lorenzo, though lost now, was Filelfo's translation of Appianus.⁵²

The moment to demonstrate the strength of these ties that bound him to Lorenzo il Magnifico came in 1478. The news of the assassination of Giuliano de' Medici, following only fifteen months after the assassination of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, shook all Italy. Filelfo condoled with Lorenzo and expressed his wish to write the history of the conspiracy.⁵³ A year previously he had already revealed his intention to stay in Milan, which was tantamount to breaking with Sixtus IV, and simultaneously he had announced his interest in writing a history of Florence.⁵⁴ Now Lorenzo obviously sent Filelfo the required information about the background of the conspiracy, for in the course of the summer of 1478 Filelfo addressed two letters to Sixtus IV which amounted to a sweeping indictment of the pope's policies. In the first of these letters Filelfo heavily denounced Francesco Salviati and warned the pope never to appoint an unworthy prelate again. Then he emphasised that the pope had no jurisdiction over Florence whatsoever; therefore the excommunication imposed on the city was an act of outrageous injustice which might provoke a general council: 'What are the peoples of Northern Europe going to do in such an obvious and undisputable case of justice, since they will demonstrate that under your instigation, under your leadership, under your auspices such an unheard of, repulsive, ugly, cruel, bloody

abomination has flared up at Florence through the intrigues of the Church and, since the intention was yours, of yourself.'⁵⁵ Then Filelfo reverted to his pet subject of punning on words and threatened that Sixtus would in future be known as Xystus, that is the dart that pierces Church and Christianity. The letter closed with a sharp injunction not to let private interests interfere with the dignity of the office. The next letter was addressed to Xystus IV, a bad omen of its content.⁵⁶ Now Filelfo dared to write even more explicitly. He bitterly complained of the pope's nepotism which had raised such utterly despicable characters as Pietro Riario and Geronimo Riario to wealth and power. Then the pope came under attack for his ingratitude towards Milan, manifested in the part he had played in the rebellion of Genoa. Filelfo did not even shirk the downright charge of accusing Sixtus of helping the Turks by stirring up wars in Italy. The letter concluded with an open threat that such a pope ought to be deposed as soon as possible. These letters, although allowing for the fact that Filelfo had broken with the pope a year previously and stood to lose nothing, are a remarkable sign of courage and loyalty. With the stylistic elegance that mixes irony and indignation, threats and sarcasms, Filelfo partly redeemed the repulsive gossip he had spread about Cosimo de' Medici and Pius II. Above all, the fact that he spoke out frankly to a still extremely powerful pope earns Filelfo some credit and lessens the charge of unprincipled opportunism which had been the hallmark of his behaviour on so many other occasions.

Since the early 1450s Filelfo had his eyes on a professorship at Florence. Once he tried to secure for himself the succession to Carlo Marsuppini, then he was one of the candidates for the new chair of Greek and philosophy together with John Argyropoulus and Cristoforo Landino.⁵⁷ But any attempt at being recalled foundered on the legal

obstacle of the banishment. A new opportunity appeared briefly in 1473 when Filelfo offered himself with the support of Cicco Simonetta as a teacher for the new 'Studio' at Pisa.⁵⁸ There he hoped to circumvent the obstacle of the old sentence, but Lorenzo showed no interest in this suggestion. Matters lay dormant for another seven years. Filelfo took a lively interest in the affairs of the Florentine 'Studio' by recommending suitable candidates. In 1475 his intervention secured, for example, the chair of Greek for Demetrius Chalcondyla,⁵⁹ but Filelfo himself had to wait until 1480. Only then Lorenzo de' Medici finally made him an offer. This invitation must be interpreted more as a gesture of generosity than as a serious decision to call an outstanding teacher. At the age of 83 Filelfo could hardly be expected to teach for a long time; his constitution was frail and his reputation as a teacher had waned long ago. Also, Lorenzo was never deeply impressed by Filelfo's prose or poetry.⁶⁰ Significantly the sentence of banishment was only suspended, not revoked, and when Filelfo entered the city in 1481 a Dominican friar thought it safer to publish a detailed refutation of Filelfo's earlier aspersions cast on the Medici.⁶¹

If Filelfo appeared repulsive in the vilification campaign against Cosimo de' Medici, this was only a corollary of his deep attachment to the opposing faction, to Palla Strozzi and the Strozzi family in particular.⁶² Palla Strozzi,⁶³ the erudite aristocrat, affable and modest in character, to whom the Florentine 'Studio' owed more than to anyone else, the personal friend of Manuel Chrysoloras, made a profound impression upon Filelfo when they first met at Bologna as Palla was returning from peace negotiations at Brescia.⁶⁴ Palla Strozzi had most strongly insisted that Filelfo should be given a chair at Florence,⁶⁵ and Filelfo acknowledged these efforts by dedicating two

translations from Lysias to his *maecenas*⁶⁶ and by eulogizing Palla whenever an opportunity arose.⁶⁷ During his time at Florence, Francesco Filelfo was a regular visitor in Palla Strozzi's home; the '*Commentationes Florentinae de exilio*' recapture wistfully that atmosphere of the days at Florence.⁶⁸ Filelfo was also engaged in teaching Palla's son Onofrio who expressed a spontaneous veneration for his master.⁶⁹ In the critical days of 1433 and 1434 Filelfo tried vainly to push his patron to a more decisive policy, realizing that Palla's passive indecision would cost him dearly eventually.⁷⁰ But once banishment had been pronounced Filelfo showed an unfaltering loyalty to his benefactor in exile. During the first twenty years after 1434 little correspondence took place for obvious political reasons.⁷¹ Palla certainly frowned at Filelfo's clamorous anti-Medicean propaganda. But during the last years of his life Palla Strozzi resumed very close relations with Filelfo. Through their common interest in Greek they were drawn together. Filelfo recommended Greeks to Padua,⁷² he asked for some of Palla's manuscripts to be lent to him in order to copy them⁷³ and he was deeply moved when he received a copy of Lysias in Palla's own handwriting.⁷⁴ During that period around 1460 Francesco Filelfo began to try his hand at Greek poetry for, as he had confessed to Palla Strozzi, he aspired to surpassing all other writers in sheer versatility.⁷⁵ Three of the Greek poems were dedicated to Palla Strozzi.⁷⁶ In April 1462 Palla Strozzi, one of the most remarkable characters in the Florentine aristocracy, died after twenty-eight years of exile. Had he not been overshadowed by his more successful rival Cosimo, he would certainly rank among the most famous Florentines of the 15th century, conspicuous in his learning, irreproachable in his uprightness and wise and modest in his political resignation. Filelfo devoted to

his memory one of the most sincere letters. Consoling Onofrio and Gianfrancesco Strozzi over the loss of their father he called Palla Strozzi 'our common father'.⁷⁷ Shortly afterwards he wrote an obituary of which only an Italian version has survived.⁷⁸

Together with Cosimo de' Medici, the chief enemy of Francesco Filelfo by 1435 was Poggio Bracciolini.⁷⁹ They had first come into contact in 1432,⁸⁰ at which time nothing foreboded their imminent clash. The rupture came in the wake of the curia's transfer to Florence in 1434. Poggio took, of course, the side of Cosimo and of Niccolò Niccoli, against whom Filelfo was just publishing some of his most truculent satires.⁸¹ Niccoli himself was helpless. He never published anything himself for fear of stylistic inadequacy; least of all would he be thinking of writing an invective. His friend Poggio was of a different mettle. His first counterattack on Filelfo appeared in late 1434 or in January 1435. With this step he defiantly threw down the glove for one of the feuds that must count among the worst of that not necessarily peace-loving century.⁸² Filelfo asked briefly whether Poggio was truly the author of this attack,⁸³ Poggio answered laconically that he had no reason for disowning what he had indeed written.⁸⁴ At once Poggio, under the nickname Bambalio, became a prime target of Filelfo's satires.⁸⁵ Particularly on the occasion of Poggio's marriage Filelfo dug up loads of denigrating mud to fling at the groom.⁸⁶ And, as if these gross obscenities were not sufficient, Filelfo vitiated most of his works written in the first years at Milan with largely unmotivated side-attacks of the most vulgar nature upon Poggio.⁸⁷ Poggio never allowed himself to be outdone by Filelfo in insults. His first invective was soon followed by a second one.⁸⁸ Some of the sauciest stories in his 'Facetiae' pour ridicule over Filelfo.⁸⁹ Even at the graveside of Niccolò Niccoli

he could not refrain from painting Filelfo as a lecherous monster.⁹⁰ In this quarrel Cincio Romano made a tentative step to patch up hostilities in 1443.⁹¹ But his good intentions were thwarted by Filelfo who broke the agreed truce by publishing his 'Commentationes Florentinae de exilio' and at the same time a new satire.⁹² Poggio could no longer remain passive when offended by such provocations. He hurled now his third and most sarcastic invective against Filelfo.⁹³ At this juncture Pietro Tommasi, the Venetian friend of both Filelfo and Poggio, interposed his calm reasoning in the envenomed feud. By gradual persuasion and appeasing admonitions he succeeded in a four-year-long effort to reconcile the two humanists, at least superficially.⁹⁴ Outwardly peace was restored, Filelfo in his turn tried to reconcile Poggio and Lorenzo Valla several years later,⁹⁵ in his letters to Florence he did not forget to send his regards to the 'most eloquent' Poggio;⁹⁶ Poggio on the other hand refuted Valla's attempt to tease him with the Filelfo feud by pointing out that it was useless to fan quenched ashes.⁹⁷ After Poggio's death, however, Filelfo's true feelings reemerged: Filelfo attacked Poggio's arguments on the origin of the 'Volgare',⁹⁸ the 'Cyropaedia' was translated with the evident purpose of clearing up Poggio's muddle,⁹⁹ and even in his last years Filelfo could not withstand the temptation of lashing out at 'that drunkard Poggio'.¹⁰⁰

The third archenemy of Filelfo, besides P.C. Decembrio and Poggio Bracciolini - if Niccolò Niccoli is to be left out - was Carlo Marsuppini.¹⁰¹ He had been Filelfo's rival at Florence in teaching Greek and rhetoric¹⁰² and there remains little doubt that he resorted to a number of highly unfair tricks in order to disrupt Filelfo's lectures and to have Filelfo sacked.¹⁰³ Already immediately after his arrival at Florence Filelfo sensed that he was not getting

on well with Marsuppini.¹⁰⁴ The mutual dislike increased and flared up in Filelfo's open denunciation of Carlo Marsuppini's intrigues.¹⁰⁵ Now 'Codrus', Filelfo's nickname for his rival, became another target of relentless satires.¹⁰⁶ A late attempt to reconcile the two opponents miscarried.¹⁰⁷ After Marsuppini's death Filelfo raised charges against him similar to those directed against P.C. Decembrio, namely of wilfully corrupting texts,¹⁰⁸ and it was simply negligence on Filelfo's part if Carlo Marsuppini was not included in the list of people Filelfo really hated as it was set down in a letter to Lodrisio Crivelli.¹⁰⁹

Ambrogio Traversari, another highly characteristic personality of early Florentine humanism, was dead by the time Filelfo came to Milan.¹¹⁰

Filelfo remained in friendly correspondence only with Gianozzo Manetti¹¹¹ and Leonardo Bruni,¹¹² both of whom viewed with some scepticism Cosimo de' Medici's preponderant position in Florentine politics.

With the new political set-up of 1450 relations with Florence grew more intensive again. A new generation had risen there which was alien to the violent party strife of the pre-Medicean days. Angelo Acciaiuoli's role in reconciling Filelfo with the Medici family has been mentioned.¹¹³ This eminent diplomat knew Filelfo well since the time Filelfo had lectured in Florence, and frequent embassies of Angelo Acciaiuoli to Milan and France kept the two in close personal touch. Angelo Acciaiuoli became a powerful friend of Filelfo at Florence, to whom Filelfo frequently appealed for help¹¹⁴ and whose efforts he gratefully acknowledged.¹¹⁵

More important in a humanistic context was the relationship between Angelo's cousin Donato Acciaiuoli¹¹⁶ and Francesco Filelfo.

The young man with a keen interest in humanistic studies had heard a great deal about Filelfo from his grandfather, Palla Strozzi. His tutor, Giacomo Ammanati, was also an admirer of Filelfo. So it was only natural that Donato Acciaiuoli should turn to Filelfo with some questions about learning Greek. The beginnings of their correspondence seem to be lost. In the 1450s a vivid exchange of letters is traceable in which Filelfo asked for Greek manuscripts and sent some of his own works,¹¹⁷ while Donato recommended friends and told about the formation of the Florentine Academy.¹¹⁸ Early in 1458 Giacomo Acciaiuoli, Donato's brother, was in Milan to attend some courses given by Filelfo.¹¹⁹ Donato's efforts to call John Argyropoulos to Florence were supported eagerly by Filelfo who greatly admired the Greek and did everything to help him settle in Italy after the disaster of 1453.¹²⁰ The scarcity of letters for the later decades in Filelfo's life does not imply that his friendship with Donato Acciaiuoli diminished. After the death of Pietro de' Medici Donato turned at once to Filelfo inviting him to write a memorial for the deceased.¹²¹ In 1475 they met at Florence and Filelfo promised to look for a suitable teacher in Greek. As a result, Demetrius Chalcondyla was appointed to the chair in Florence.¹²² When Donato Acciaiuoli died in Milan on 28 August 1478 we may suppose Filelfo to have been at his side. Through Donato Acciaiuoli, who once expressed his admiration for Filelfo in a letter to Bartolomeo Scala,¹²³ Filelfo entered into contact with a number of other prominent Florentine humanists, without, however, any intimate understanding of the idealism that inspired the Academy. Plato remained for Filelfo chiefly the author of the 'Cratylus' and of the 'Apologia'; of the other works he knew the outlines and a few quotations, but his philosophical appreciation must be regarded as rather poor.¹²⁴

Apart from Bartolomeo Scala, who visited Milan in 1454,¹²⁵ Filelfo wrote to Marsilio Ficino,¹²⁶ and Alamanno Rinuccini,¹²⁷ but the intrinsic character of the Florentine Academy remained totally alien to him.

Andrea Alamanni,¹²⁸ diplomat, humanist and one of the founders of the Academy in 1455, had been in contact with Filelfo by virtue of his membership in the circle of Niccolò della Luna, a faithful pupil of Filelfo.¹²⁹ It must have been this association with Niccolò della Luna which earned Andrea Alamanni Filelfo's confidence to such an extent that after the exchange of only a few letters Filelfo wrote to Alamanni a kind of philosophical confession, explaining why he regarded himself as a cynic,¹³⁰ why he despised wealth, what his views on 'voluptas' and its relation to 'honor' and 'utilitas' were, etc.¹³¹ Particularly, Alamanni's knowledge of Greek recommended him to Filelfo, who regarded everybody without a grasp of Greek as only semi-educated.¹³² It appears that Andrea Alamanni instigated Filelfo to write a Greek dictionary and he may also have been the driving agent behind Filelfo's Greek grammar.¹³³ The other letters, though fairly numerous, are disappointing to read, since they are exclusively concerned with various demands for commodities made by Filelfo.¹³⁴ In 1469 Filelfo met Andrea Alamanni personally for the first time. Through him he was introduced to Franco Sacchetti and Alamanno Rinuccini.¹³⁵ But despite Filelfo's encomiastic poems addressed to Andrea Alamanni¹³⁶ the divergent interests of the two humanists produced a creeping alienation. Humanism in Florence at that time took a new turn. It was a vivid force that would not tolerate arrest. It was now generating a new devotion to Platonic philosophy and to more refined philological methods. What had been astonishingly modern in the 1430s had become

a commonplace in the meantime. Filelfo fell behind the more recent developments in humanism not only in his philology, but also in his poetry. Panegyric elegy and the licentious epigram no longer set the fashion. Florence was about to hail the lyrical poetry of Angelo Poliziano who remotely resembled what Filelfo might have been had a serious, strong-willed character and a relentless self-discipline made better use of the exuberant intellectual talents which Filelfo undeniably possessed.

4. Siena

Siena was the fourth republican city where Filelfo taught before accepting the offer from Milan.¹ Apart from the nasty troubles during the first two years, which involved Filelfo in a fierce vendetta with the Medici faction of Florence, the four years of teaching at Siena must have been enjoyable and successful. Three times initiatives were later made to recall him. The last time he was on the point of accepting, but then the alluring prospect of opportunities at Milan under Francesco Sforza detained Filelfo in Lombardy.² Siena certainly appeared to him as an island of peace and prosperity, when he later cast his mind back to those days spent in the pleasant surroundings of the Tuscan city.³ He revisited Siena twice: in 1469 Filelfo had to escort two of his grandchildren back to their father at Siena;⁴ in 1475 he passed through the city on his way back to Rome.⁵ He had left a considerable number of pupils in Siena, first among whom must rank Agostino Dati, renowned historian and teacher.⁶ Filelfo regarded Dati as one of his best students and wrote to him: 'I am pleased with your learning, pleased with the brilliance of your rhetoric, but above all with your modesty

and humanity.⁷ One point, however, obscured their friendship in later years. On his departure from Siena in 1438 Filelfo had left some of his letters in the hands of Agostino Dati, among them those two which he had written in 1436 to the Council of Basle and to Giuliano Cesarini.⁸ Repeatedly Filelfo demanded the restitution of these valuable letters,⁹ but they were never returned.¹⁰

Another outstanding humanist of Siena who had been taught by Filelfo was Francesco Patrizi,¹¹ later to be raised to the bishopric of Gaeta by Pius II. Filelfo turned to him in the first place in the negotiations for an eventual return.¹² In 1457/1458, when Patrizi was involved in the abortive coup d'état of the nobility and when he was threatened with execution on that account, Filelfo offered all his help through Nicodemo Tranchedini.¹³ In 1465 Patrizi formed part of the train that was to accompany Ippolita Sforza to Naples. He visited Filelfo at Milan,¹⁴ who tried to start a regular correspondence, but Patrizi's demure aloofness was probably to blame if after July 1465 no more letters were exchanged.¹⁵ Filelfo had become too much of a controversial figure through the Pius II scandal; to become associated with the short-tempered humanist of Milan could now be an undesirable embarrassment for a person of ecclesiastical rank. Despite his earlier admiration for Filelfo,¹⁶ Patrizi had to take care of his ecclesiastical career and was therefore no longer interested in passing for the pupil of somebody who had become notorious.

In his stead Francesco Accolti d'Arezzo¹⁷ provided a new, very strong link with Siena after he had left Milan in 1466 to take up teaching at Siena. He had held high office with distinction under Francesco Sforza as ambassador and Secret Counsellor.¹⁸ Now at Siena he wanted to be kept informed about events at Milan and so his

correspondence with Filelfo dwelled on political changes within the Milanese administration and on the intentions of the new duke.¹⁹ Filelfo recommended friends to him²⁰ and showed himself extremely concerned to keep this friendship alive.²¹ But in 1474 the letters fizzled out; for the last seven years of Filelfo's life no further contacts between the two humanists are recorded.

Among the other pupils Filelfo had at Siena, Sassolo da Prato²² and Pietro Pierleoni²³ deserve some special attention. Both went to Greece in order to satisfy their enthusiasm for Greek which had been kindled by Filelfo.²⁴ Sassolo da Prato later became a student under Vittorino da Feltre; in 1449 he committed suicide at a very young age.²⁵ He had been one of Filelfo's most promising pupils.²⁶ Pietro Pierleoni taught later at Genoa, Rimini and Venice. With Filelfo he was linked by a steady correspondence and by Filelfo's undefatigable concern for his career, for wherever he intended to go he went well provisioned with recommendations from his old teacher.²⁷ But it was not only with 'professional' humanists at Siena that Filelfo stayed in contact. Equally important, though less conspicuous in his correspondence, were the relations with lawyers and patricians of the city, like Pietro Michael,²⁸ Andreuccio and Antonio Petrucci,²⁹ Memo da Siena, later bishop of Grosseto,³⁰ Lodovico Petroni³¹ and Benedetto Martinozzi.³²

Siena was only a minor centre of humanistic studies, but the presence of Filelfo within the city walls provided a powerful momentum for dragging the city fully into the mainstream of Italian humanism.

5. Mantua

At Mantua Vittorino da Feltre was the dominant figure in the field of humanism up to his death in 1446.¹ Francesco Filelfo had met him as a student at Padua, where both frequented the lectures of Gasparino Barzizza. Later they were to work for a brief spell together at Venice.² It appears that Vittorino made great efforts immediately after Filelfo's return from Constantinople to attract him to Mantua;³ certainly Filelfo enjoyed the favour of the Marquis Gianfrancesco, whom he was to praise later as a paragon of munificence.⁴ The old friendship between the two humanists remained always cordial and intimate, based on mutual respect and support. Several pupils of Filelfo went on to Vittorino's school at Mantua,⁵ younger students were recommended to go straight to Mantua by Filelfo.⁶ Vittorino, whose grasp of Greek was inferior to Filelfo's, frequently asked for Filelfo's advice,⁷ borrowed books from Filelfo's library⁸ and allowed Filelfo to draw freely in his turn on the libraries of Mantua for rare books.⁹ No other humanist was so reverently spoken of by Filelfo than the modest, unassuming Vittorino.¹⁰

Through Vittorino's education Lodovico Gonzaga, the ruler of Mantua from 1444 to 1478, had been brought up with a keen interest in the arts. He was the first lord of Mantua to turn his city into a veritable focus of humanistic studies and Renaissance art by way of his unstinting generosity. Filelfo was one of his particularly favoured clients.¹¹ Lodovico Gonzaga and Filelfo met probably immediately after the humanist's arrival at Milan, when Lodovico was still serving in the pay of Filippo Maria Visconti because of the rupture with his father.¹² Certainly the first surviving letter presupposes a well-established acquaintance and a preceding correspondence.¹³ The Italian letters exchanged between Lodovico Gonzaga and

Filelfo reveal how the court poet was making up for the deficiencies of his income at Milan. On one occasion it is fifty ducats he wants for a dowry,¹⁴ another time he asks for a hundred ducats as a contribution towards expenses for a projected journey to France,¹⁵ now he writes in anguish that Galeazzo Maria Sforza refuses to pay the arrears of his stipend amounting to 700 ducats,¹⁶ then he urges an immediate payment of some hundred ducats that had been vaguely promised some time ago.¹⁷ And on the whole the Gonzaga met these requests.¹⁸ Filelfo was deeply grateful for such generosity. He expressed profuse thanks, mingled with a good dose of adulation in some of the more formal Latin letters,¹⁹ and in his 'De iocis et seriis' he inserted among other begging epigrams to Lodovico Gonzaga the following lines:

Munus id accepi, princeps Lodovice, deabus
 Quod tua Pieriis dextra benigna dedit.
 Quod per se quanquam placuit mihi, gratius illud
 Reddit amor, quo me duxeris esse tuum.
 Tu mihi fundus ades, tuque horrea certa patensque
 Thesaurus semper praesidiumque ferax.
 Oh, tibi si facilem deus in tua vota supernus
 Praestet et imperium tollat in astra tuum.
 Quis tibi non optet longaevi Nestoris annos?
 Quis tibi non optet cuncta secunda dari?
 Te melior nemo est, te principe doctior alter
 Nullus, tu phoenix mirus in astra volas.
 Quod valeo, meritis te semper laudibus unum
 Prosequar et vera te pietate colam.²⁰

A similar tone had been struck in the other poems addressed to the Marquis of Mantua²¹ who was also given a prominent place in the 'Sforzias' as a great war-hero.²²

In order to strengthen these ties of benevolence Filelfo went quite frequently to Mantua. In 1453 and in 1458 he passed through the city on his way to Rome.²³ In September/October 1459 he stayed there attending the international congress which provided an opportunity for Filelfo to make innumerable acquaintances among the prelates and ambassadors that were present.²⁴ Early in 1463 he paid another visit to Mantua²⁵ and in 1469 he probably stayed there as

the Marquis's guest on his outward journey to Siena.²⁶ In 1474 and in 1476 Filelfo spent several days at Mantua; in 1476 this delay was much against his own will, since he wanted to see his desperately ill wife as soon as possible, but as he was not allowed to proceed to Milan because of the seare of the plague, he had to wait until he received the clearance of the health commission.²⁷

Lodovico's wife Barbara of Brandenburg was no less generous towards Filelfo than her husband. In 1459 she invited the Milanese humanist to write an oration which her 15 year old son Francesco would be able to recite before the pope.²⁸ This was the same Francesco who two years later, on 18 December 1461, was to be created cardinal and consequently became the most powerful protector of Filelfo at Rome, together with his secretary Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene, also a Mantuan.

The other children of the Gonzaga were less closely connected with Filelfo. Dorotea, who had at one time been betrothed to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, died prematurely in 1467, her death being greatly lamented by Filelfo.²⁹ Federigo, the heir and successor in 1478, was downright hostile to Filelfo. The reason may be sought in Filelfo's admonitions, in which he sharply criticized the education of the young prince implying that a boy of that age should engage in more serious pursuits.³⁰ Being convinced of the overriding importance of education for an adolescent prince, Filelfo later recommended Gabriel Pavero Fontata to Federigo Gonzaga as a teacher for Federigo's children.³¹ But Federigo apparently showed no interest in this suggestion. After Federigo's accession, Filelfo's allowances were drastically cut,³² and the humanist's flattering demands for any subsidy met with the stern refusal from the Marquis.³³

The nature of Filelfo's relationship with the Gonzaga entailed necessarily close contacts with the resident ambassadors of Mantua

at Milan, Vincenzo Scalona and later Zaccaria Saggio da Pisa.³⁴ For some important facts which happened at the Milanese court during this period we have to rely on their accounts.

The attachment of Francesco Filelfo to Mantua is spotlighted by the fact that both his sons Gian Mario and Xenophon spent several years there.³⁵ Otherwise, however, it is disappointing to find how little Francesco Filelfo was interested in the humanists that stayed at the court of the Gonzaga. Only Theodore Gaza³⁶ and Sassolo da Prato, who introduced Giovanni Andrea Bussi to Filelfo from Mantua,³⁷ appear in Filelfo's epistolary. No trace can be found of Bartolemeo Platina,³⁸ Gregorio da Città di Castello or Leon Battista Alberti, who all spent several years in Mantua during Filelfo's lifetime. For Filelfo the important matter was that in Mantua he had a source of revenue and a ruler prepared to receive him with all the pomp and protocol to which Filelfo believed himself to be entitled as a 'divine' poet. That was why he expressed such an admiration for Lodovico Gonzaga. Any other activity of the Marquis mattered negligibly little to Filelfo, who remained in most of his relations with other humanistic centres extremely self-centred.

6. Ferrara

The role played by Vittorino at Mantua was represented by Guarino da Verona at Ferrara, who was at the court of the Este the protagonist of a new curriculum, head of a famous school and an acknowledged philologist.¹ In the early 15th century Guarino and Filelfo were undoubtedly the foremost teachers of Greek, both having learnt to speak the language thoroughly at Constantinople in the house of the Chrysoloras family.² Before Filelfo's departure they had

been together at Padua and Venice, where they had forged a firm friendship.³ The dubious way in which Filelfo married into the Chrysoloras family⁴ and his bustling superficiality at Bologna, where Guarino had helped him to find employment,⁵ aroused some suspicion in the austere educator at Ferrara.⁶ Although several letters exchanged between the two humanists must now be regarded as lost, they never quite restored that spontaneous intimacy after Filelfo's return from Thrace. Guarino warned Filelfo not to trust Niccolò Niccoli⁷ with whom he himself had had a violent clash some time previously,⁸ but after Filelfo's transfer to Florence no further correspondence between Guarino and Filelfo is recorded except for two letters in which Filelfo asks for a copy of Strabo, since what he alleged to have been his own copy was still in the hands of Leonardo Giustinian.⁹ Some unfortunate criticism made by Guarino against a wedding speech pronounced by Filelfo at Ferrara on 6 February 1455 was sufficient to provoke Filelfo's scornful jealousy. In an acrimonious letter the Milanese humanist asked: 'What can Guarino possibly know, that Filelfo does not know?'¹⁰ In the light of this letter Filelfo's later remark that he had always venerated Guarino rings somewhat hollow.¹¹

That Guarino in his turn did not think very much of the boisterous poet at Milan is documented not only by the absence of any letter to Filelfo in the collection of his letters but also by the marked reserve shown by many of his pupils towards Francesco Filelfo.¹²

Regardless of this growing estrangement Filelfo had at least two offers to come to Ferrara up to 1450. The first one reached him in 1428,¹³ the second one in 1440.¹⁴ But although he refused on both occasions, Filelfo's ties with Ferrara were singularly strong and reinforced by several visits in 1452, in 1455, and in 1460.¹⁵

With the accession of Borso d'Este a period of unqualified bliss for the Milanese poet was ushered in. Although only three letters of Filelfo addressed to Borso have been preserved,¹⁶ their correspondence must have been rather lively and regular.¹⁷ Borso, who loved splendour and magnificence, spent astronomical sums of money on patronage and pageantry. The protection of artists and writers, the collecting of coins, medals and precious stones, the sumptuous decoration of buildings and manuscripts were activities proper for a prince of Borso's standing, and for want of political power Borso indulged in patronizing to an extent that was only approximated later by Federigo da Montefeltre.¹⁸ Thus the duke of Modena sent regular presents to the poet at Milan, he provided generous dowries,¹⁹ issued 'litterae familiaritatis' to the humanist²⁰ and lavishly rewarded any of the poet's efforts, some of which addressed to Borso must have perished.²¹ In his letters Filelfo knew no limits in the reiterated expression of his gratitude. Borso was called the 'phoenix',²² the sun in a darkening time when most other princes proved stingy and parsimonious.²³ In 1471, when Filelfo was desperately looking for some place where he could stay more comfortably than at Milan, Borso made an inviting offer, but the unexpected death of the newly created duke of Ferrara destroyed the project,²⁴ since his successor and brother Ercole d'Este showed very little interest in squandering money on a decrepit humanist like Filelfo.²⁵ Although diplomatically Ferrara moved more closely towards Milan,²⁶ there is no evidence to suggest that the singular generosity of Borso towards Filelfo was in any way continued by Ercole. A last glimpse which we can catch through a recommendation written by Ercole to Federigo Gonzaga on behalf of Filelfo²⁷ may even imply that in his last years the Milanese humanist had become an open embarrassment to everybody: one knew he had to be provided for, one was hoping for his timely death, but nobody wanted particularly to

maintain such an irascible and quarrelsome character at his court. Bologna did not want him, Venice procrastinated, Rome was never really enthusiastic about his appointment, Mantua refused to pay any more, recommending him to Bologna, and Ferrara wanted to shift the burden to Mantua. Finally it was Florence that received the old humanist, but even there nobody felt a great loss when Filelfo died shortly afterwards.

Thus the time of Borso d'Este represented the period of closest relations between Ferrara and Francesco Filelfo. Bianca Maria d'Este, Borso's sister, and Niccolò, the youthful son of Leonello, were his particular friends.²⁸ But, in marked difference from Mantua, in Ferrara a representative cross-section of humanists beyond the narrow circle of the ruling family was in regular correspondence with Filelfo. First of all there was Giovanni Aurispa,²⁹ the humanist collector of books whom Filelfo had known since they met at Constantinople.³⁰ To nobody else did Filelfo write so frankly and with so little restraint as to Aurispa. He wrote to him at great length about his experiences at Bologna, Florence and Milan.³¹ Aurispa explicitly warned him not to go to Florence, since he would regret it - a true prophecy, alas.³² Most important for both of them was their mutual borrowing of books, although Filelfo was in this respect far more generous than Aurispa.³³ A copy of Pollux, which he had lent to Aurispa, did not return for over twenty years,³⁴ and on one occasion Filelfo simply refused to lend anything more: 'Nobody is more rapacious in receiving than you, my Aurispa, but in giving nobody is more stingy than you are. Therefore, in order to avoid justified suspicion, I will not send you what you want.'³⁵ But even despite such occasional bad temper on the whole very good relations subsisted: 'Nobody knows better, how much I always esteemed you, than you yourself', Filelfo wrote in 1454,³⁶

and upon the news of Aurispa's death he composed an epigram which reflected his true feelings of sympathy and respect for the deceased humanist.³⁷

No less important for the humanist movement at Ferrara were the 'non-professional' humanists like Niccolò Varoni, Lodovico Casella and Geronimo Castelli. Niccolò Varoni³⁸ was for some time Filelfo's closest friend at Ferrara.³⁹ During the conflict between Milan and Venice he was used as the man to keep contact between Filelfo and his Venetian friends.⁴⁰ Soon after Filelfo's visit to Ferrara in 1452, however, Niccolò Varoni detached himself from Filelfo, who vainly tried to provoke a reply from Varoni by broaching topical questions like that of the nature of atoms.⁴¹ The last flicker in their correspondence after five years of silence occurred in 1459, when Filelfo laid the blame for the protracted silence on Varoni's laziness, asking him at the same time to support, together with Lodovico Casella, Filelfo's project of moving to Rome.⁴²

Lodovico Casella⁴³ was by that time an old and trusted friend of Filelfo. The Milanese humanist had been introduced to him through his son Gian Mario,⁴⁴ and Filelfo's visit to Ferrara late in 1452 drew the two humanists closer together.⁴⁵ Casella was secretary, minister and secret counsellor to Borso. He therefore wielded a considerable influence at the court, advising Borso on matters of policy and patronage. His correspondence with Filelfo centred consequently primarily on matters like recommendations⁴⁶ and rewards.⁴⁷ Through Casella, Filelfo often indirectly approached the purse of Borso,⁴⁸ and two letters to Lodovico Casella seem to suggest that Filelfo even enjoyed the revenues of some estate in Ferrara.⁴⁹

Geronimo Castelli⁵⁰ figures conspicuously among Filelfo's friends. He had met Filelfo in 1455 at the wedding of Beatrice d'Este and

Tristano Sforza.⁵¹ Geronimo's knowledge of Greek considerably impressed Filelfo who subsequently addressed three of his Greek poems to the learned physician.⁵² The familiarity between the two humanists is further attested by numerous letters in which Filelfo recommended travellers to Castelli⁵³ or asked him to acquire certain Greek books which could not be found at Milan.⁵⁴

The temporary transference of Tommaso Tebaldi to Ferrara in 1461 provided another substantial link between Filelfo and Ferrara.⁵⁵ On the whole the surviving documents form only the tip of an iceberg, the larger part of which is submerged, for the sporadic sources hint at a large number of lesser men who were in equally close touch with Filelfo, like Angelo Decembrio,⁵⁶ Giovanni Toscanella,⁵⁷ Janus of Pannonia⁵⁸ and the two poets Lodovico Carbone⁵⁹ and Tito Vespasiano Strozzi.⁶⁰ Perhaps the impression is right that nowhere else outside Milan did Filelfo influence the development of humanism and Latin verse composition to the same extent as at Ferrara.

7. Rome

Despite the long absence of the papacy in Avignon in the 14th century and regardless of the sorrowful decline of the empire, Rome was still surrounded by an aura of splendour as the nominal seat of the two supreme powers in the 15th century. As the largest centre of diplomatic activity the papal court offered employment to numerous humanists for the drafting of state letters and for the calligraphic copying of documents.¹ To be at Rome was therefore, like being at Florence, a lifelong dream of Filelfo; service and distinction at the curia combined with a handsome benefice were his highest ambitions.

Very shortly after his return from Constantinople offers were

being made from Rome,² where Filelfo had powerful friends at that time, like Antonio Loschi,³ Cincio Rustici⁴ and Niccolò Albergati.⁵ But for the time being Florence exercised a greater spell upon the young humanist. As Filelfo's position there grew more precarious, however, he resolved to take refuge at Rome as soon as his obligations at Florence had expired.⁶ But the pope's flight from Rome to Florence and Eugenius IV's involvement with the Medici faction left Filelfo cornered in an awkward dilemma. Hostility with the Medici was bound to antagonize the pope as well, and through his virulent feud with Poggio, Filelfo had alienated a considerable number of men in the curia. Thus Eugenius's offer of a secretariat, made through Giovanni Vitelleschi, remained an empty gesture. After 1434 any thought of a return to Florence had become unreal.⁷ As Filelfo later said, he waited at Siena for further approaches to be made to him in this matter, assuming that the pope would soon go back to Rome and thus regain his freedom of action. But finally, despairing that he would ever find a place in the curia, Filelfo took up the offer of Filippo Maria Visconti.⁸

The election of Nicolas V in March 1447 infused new hopes in Filelfo. As secretary of Filelfo's generous patron Niccolò Albergati, Tommaso Parentucelli had become a close friend of the young humanist.⁹ Now Filelfo hoped to reap the rewards of this friendship. When the news of Nicolas's accession reached Milan, Filelfo wrote a congratulatory letter, leaving the most important message, namely his request to be considered for a benefice, to be delivered orally by the cardinal archbishop of Milan, Enrico Rampini.¹⁰ The sudden death of the duke of Milan and the ensuing turmoil made it even more desirable for Filelfo to leave Milan as quickly as possible. The pope's offer of a secretariate, made through Giovanni Toscanella in July, 1447,¹¹

was now eagerly taken up by Filelfo.¹² The rulers of the Ambrosian Republic, however, refused to grant Filelfo a permit to leave, fearing to lose prestige, if the renowned humanist left Milan.¹³ With the death of his second wife early in 1448¹⁴ and with the growing insecurity at Milan, Filelfo, always prone to extreme sentiments, plunged into a deep depression, in which he requested Nicolas V to allow him to become a monk.¹⁵ This was not the first time that Filelfo had such thoughts. Early at Venice in about 1420 he had been only narrowly dissuaded from donning the cowl by a well-meaning friend.¹⁶ In 1441 after the death of his first wife he had asked Eugenius IV to be allowed to leave the secular life.¹⁷ Now Filelfo was conjuring Nicolas V to grant exemption from the canon law which forbade anyone who had been married twice to take vows. Filelfo asked for a task within the clergy and for an appropriate rank in the hierarchy.¹⁸ Fortunately, Nicolas V knew well enough the volatile character of Filelfo, so he simply ignored this petition as his predecessor had done.¹⁹ It is indeed difficult to imagine what kind of a monk the author of the 'Satires' and of 'De iocis et seriis' would have made.

The greatest moment in Filelfo's life came in 1453 when the pope insisted that he should visit the Vatican in order to allow the pope a glance at the collection of 'Satires'. When Nicolas V returned the 'Satires' after a few days of intensive reading, he gave 500 ducats as a present to Filelfo and promised further favours.²⁰ These consisted of an honorary secretariate²¹ and a grandiose scheme to entrust to Francesco Filelfo the translation into Latin of the two Homeric epics. The reward for such a gigantic undertaking was to be a large house in Rome and 10,000 ducats, payable on the completion of the work.²² No wonder that Filelfo was full of praise for this generous patron of the arts.²³ Particularly after Giovanni Tortelli

had told Filelfo about the projected translation of Homer in 1459 - Nicolas V had never mentioned it directly to Filelfo - Filelfo burst out into a new series of panegyric poems, bewailing the death of such a *maecenas*.²⁴

Nicolas V's almost wasteful obsession with patronage formed a stark contrast to the parsimonious austerity of his successor Calixtus III. Silver plate was melted down after 1455 in order to make money for the crusade against the Crescent, and even books were sold for cash, as Filelfo noted with desperate anguish.²⁵ To Bessarion Filelfo remarked in 1458 wryly that to most people the news of Calixtus's death had come as a joyful relief; now it was the cardinals' duty to elect carefully a new pope who would not behave like the barbarous Spaniard.²⁶

To Filelfo's unspeakable delight the choice of the conclave this time fell upon Enea Silvio Piccolomini who assumed the name Pius II on his election. The humanist at Milan at once wrote a long congratulatory letter to Bessarion and to Pius II, sounding out their intentions with a view to a place for himself at Rome: 'Since old times Enea is most favourably disposed towards me. Therefore I have no small hope that with him I will find honour and large rewards.'²⁷ To Pius he wrote: 'It only remains for you to let me know, whether there is still a place left for the muses near you. But I have not the slightest doubt that there is ample room for them.'²⁸

What aroused Filelfo's hopes was the fact that the new pope had once been his pupil at Florence. From 1429 to 1431 Enea Silvio Piccolomini had frequented Filelfo's lessons at Florence, where his teacher had even helped him to raise the necessary money in order to eke out a living.²⁹ In 1431 Filelfo had recommended him to Niccolò Arcimboldi at Milan, since Enea Silvio Piccolomini was then about to

accompany Domenico Capranica to the Council of Basle.³⁰ During the following years a steady exchange of letters was kept up. When Piccolomini visited Florence in 1435 in the train of Bartolomeo Visconti, bishop of Novara, he did not miss the opportunity of also paying a visit to Filelfo at Siena.³¹ A year later he sent his master two orations which he had pronounced against Eugenius IV at Basle. The aim behind these speeches had been to win the favour of Filippo Maria Visconti, from whom Piccolomini expected a benefice. Filelfo replied tersely that he approved of the style but that he could not agree with the tenor of these speeches, since he knew the duke of Milan would not be impressed by such rhetorical efforts: 'Watch it, lest you write something you don't know about', was his admonition to the author.³² In 1439 Piccolomini enquired why Filelfo had left Siena, a question which Filelfo answered with a long account of the insidious attempts that had made life intolerable for him at Florence and at Siena.³³ In 1447 the imperial claim to the overlordship of Milan brought the two humanists into direct contact again. In the spring of the same year Filelfo, writing to Sceve da Curte who was then on a diplomatic mission at Vienna, had asked whether Piccolomini had not discovered some new manuscripts in the dusty libraries of Germany.³⁴ In the late autumn of 1447 an imperial embassy appeared in Milan to negotiate the political future of the republic. Unfortunately nothing precise is known about Enea Silvio Piccolomini's first visit to Milan.³⁵ When he returned at the head of another diplomatic group two years later he certainly did not visit Filelfo, for back in Vienna he wrote to Milan excusing his hasty departure. On the same date Piccolomini wrote to Niccolò Arcimboldi telling him about the death of Caspar Schlick and asking him to approach Filelfo for an epitaph.³⁶ Why did Piccolomini not send his request direct

to Filelfo? Is it possible to argue from these letters that Piccolomini was already trying to detach himself from his ancient master? If up to 1449 Piccolomini had sought the favour and protection of Filelfo, this relationship was now rapidly reversed, as the secretary in the imperial chancery rose quickly on the rungs of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. But in the same measure in which Filelfo began to lavish his obtrusive flattery on the bishop, and later cardinal, of Siena Piccolomini maintained a growing reserve.³⁷ He was too experienced diplomatically for his sceptical detachment to be swayed by the adulations of a reward-hunting client. When in 1457 he received some poems from Filelfo,³⁸ his answer was friendly but markedly cool.³⁹ However, Filelfo's 'Sforzias' made some impression upon him, for he put a laudatory reference to this work into his 'Europa'.⁴⁰ Thus in 1458 Filelfo believed to have an indisputable claim to his former pupil's gratitude when his prophecy, pronounced on the eve of the conclave,⁴¹ came true and Pius II was proclaimed as the new pope, whereas the pope himself was careful to avoid any closer association with Francesco Filelfo.

To understand the events that ensued upon Pius II's accession it is essential to point out that Filelfo was basically an extremely ambitious man. What he wanted was recognition, fame, honour and a generally acknowledged superiority to all other contemporary humanists.⁴² On the other hand, Filelfo loved to demonstrate the rank which he claimed for himself by outward signs of pomp and by lavish entertainment of guests and pupils. He therefore insisted that spiritual recognition must always be accompanied by material generosity; in his terms 'honor' was inseparable from 'utilitas'.⁴³ These extravagant claims for superiority were closely connected with a deeply rooted psychological insecurity which rendered Filelfo paranoically suspicious

whenever he met any kind of resistance against these claims. When somebody did not express his alleged recognition in very material terms as Filelfo demanded, such a man's sincerity would at once be doubted. In Filelfo's mind there was always a latent fear of being ridiculed. That is why the squabble over some 200 ducats could be whipped up to such a pitch of hostility as it was in Filelfo's clash with Pius II. Filelfo hoped in 1458 that Pius II would publicly show his deference to the master who had trained him in the eloquence that had proved the cornerstone in his career by bestowing honours and benefices upon Filelfo. More crudely, one could say: the papacy was in Filelfo's eyes a booty conquered by Piccolomini with Filelfo's help; now the ex-master expected his fair share of the spoils.

At first such expectations seemed to be proved right: Pius II announced to Filelfo that he had decreed an annual stipend of 200 ducats to be paid to him wherever he was, and hints of further rewards were being made.⁴⁴ Within a few months Filelfo hastened to Rome⁴⁵ regardless of the inconvenience he was causing there. Pius was probably greatly embarrassed by this obtrusive visitor, but he graciously accepted Filelfo's present.⁴⁶ At Mantua later in the same year the pope's courteous reply to the 'Attic Muse'⁴⁷ appeared to prove that Filelfo's expectations were justified, for at Mantua he also received a further instalment of his entitlement.⁴⁸ Flushed by a sentiment of grateful exhilaration Filelfo wrote from Milan to Mantua that he was now awaiting the pope's orders, as he was prepared to undertake any task for such a gracious patron.⁴⁹ In order to engrave his own name deeply upon the pope's memory, Filelfo now showered unsolicited offerings upon him. Greek poems were sent to celebrate the pope as the resurrected Nicolas V,⁵⁰ Filelfo jumped ahead in his 'Sforzias', composing canto XI which narrated the events

of Piccolomini's mission in 1449 before he had begun cantos nine and ten.⁵¹ Indeed, so firm was his belief in Pius II's generosity that at first he refused to accept Pius's authorship of a famous distich which told poets not to expect rewards for their poetry from Pius II.⁵² At that time Filelfo still hoped to eventually obtain a splendid position at Rome.⁵³ But his illusions were soon to be shattered.

In 1459 the rebellion against Ferdinand of Naples had broken out in Southern Italy; in the Campagna Pius II had to conduct protracted warfare against some unruly barons; and then, of course, money was needed for the projected crusade. Faced with such heavy financial demands - the pope felt bound to support Ferdinand massively - Pius II decided that no more money should be spent on honorary pensions. Certainly Filelfo never received a penny of his stipend after 1459. This was particularly inconvenient for him, since at the same time Francesco Sforza, equally heavily involved in financial support for Ferdinand, suspended all salaries of his courtiers.⁵⁴ So at a time when Filelfo had hoped to find compensation for lost income at Milan in a new assignment from Rome, he was let down by both sides. At first Filelfo sent a gentle reminder to Gregorio Lolli and Pius II.⁵⁵ Then he began to approach some cardinals entreating their intervention on his behalf.⁵⁶ In a rather acrimonious letter to Giacomo Ammanati-Piccolomini he complained, as his efforts proved vain: 'When Nicolas V repaid his debt to nature and God and when the government of the Roman church fell not long afterwards upon pope Pius, an incredible hope seized the minds of all learned men of regaining that good fortune which seemed to have been interred together with that holy father. And this expectation would indeed have come true, if the turbulent floods of war had not rushed into the quiet and peaceloving

mind of the most pious Pius. They have whirled it about and are still whirling about so much, that he whom almost all regarded as a haven for the muses, is now patently a war-monger.'⁵⁷

Giacomo Ammanati-Piccolomini now became the key-figure in Filelfo's relations with Pius II. This eminent humanist owed a rapid ecclesiastical career to his uncle, the pope.⁵⁸ Ammanati was a close friend of Filelfo, and when all direct correspondence between the two estranged parties was ceasing he tried to bridge that gap. But even Giacomo Ammanati-Piccolomini could not achieve what Filelfo so urgently demanded, namely the regular payment of the promised stipend. Besides, the cardinal of Pavia had a great many other concerns and could not devote much time to the interests of a humanist in distant Milan. Despite a veritable cascade of letters, poetical offerings and the gift of a copy of the 'Consolatio', the cardinal of Pavia was able to respond only in 1463 after Filelfo had tried to approach all the other cardinals at the curia as well.⁵⁹ Irony and diplomatic courtesy were mixed in this reply: '... As for the errors you have discovered in the works of His Beatitude, your correction was welcome, although Pius denies the poem to be his ... But he is convinced, that if you were here, his writings could steadily be improved under your supervision ... But in regard to your demand I have always had the same answer: We love Filelfo and have the highest esteem for him. But what can We do, if circumstances are more powerful than Our will? He would raise the same complaint here at Rome which he now expresses with the duke of Milan. The duke wages war, so do We; the duke has no money, neither do We; the duke lacks the means of maintaining learned men, so do We. In no respect is the duke's position worse than Ours. Filelfo should therefore be fair with us, wait for better times and allow this unfortunate storm to pass. We

don't reward him not because we have forgotten him, but because we don't have the means for doing so.'⁶⁰ All that Pius was in fact prepared to do for Filelfo was the confirmation of Filelfo's nominal apostolic secretariate when the 10-year term of Nicolas V's privilege expired.⁶¹ But at that moment Filelfo was not interested in honorary distinctions; he desperately needed some money and felt cheated by the pope's evasiveness. He insisted with justified indignation that promises had to be kept, particularly when given by a pope. Thus he continued to swamp the cardinals with demands to espouse his interests at Rome.⁶² He even introduced himself to Francesco Todeschini-Piccolomini, the other cardinal-nephew of Pius.⁶³ His true feelings, however, exploded in a letter to Bessarion in December 1463: 'You have been appointed legate ... by the so-called pope in order to prepare the crusade against the Turks at Venice. But considering myself what you have to do, I seem to discover that the unscrupulousness of this fox entertains quite different schemes, for as long as a man of your stature is present in the cardinals' college he won't dare do anything unworthy of his dignity. But once you are away he will entice without hesitation the sheep straight among the wolves.'⁶⁴ A month later, however, Filelfo made still a last desperate effort to win the pope's favour. He offered himself as a guide for the projected crusade. He bragged of his geographical knowledge of the areas of the eastern Mediterranean and recommended his services as an interpreter.⁶⁵ At Rome this offer was received with an appropriate dose of scepticism: it seemed doubtful whether a court poet was a suitable commander or military adviser of a crusade. Filelfo never received an answer.

There followed a period of silence on both sides during which the thunderstorm was brewing that was to explode with such unprecedented

violence after the pope's death. Only Ottone da Carretto, who accompanied Pius II to Ancona, caught a glimpse of what were Filelfo's true feelings at that time.⁶⁶ As soon as news of Pius II's death at Ancona reached Milan Filelfo threw away all restraints and gave full rein to his boiling hate. The first blow against the defunct pontiff was dealt in a letter to Lodovico Trevisan: 'I had placed great hopes upon pope Pius, who so conveniently died a few days ago, both because he had been my pupil and because since his boyhood he was such a close friend of mine that even as cardinal he used to address me as "father". But I don't know why, after he had been raised to the pontificate by the favour of fortune, he seemed to have forgotten both his old obligation by which a pupil is bound to his master and all our previous acquaintance. And I think nothing else was the reason for changing his habits as soon as his fortunes had changed but the desire to be regarded not only as the highest priest, but also as the highest philosopher, poet and orator, oblivious, as I think, of the difference between the judgment of a flatterer and that of grave and learned men. For he was so double-dealing that as soon as he had ascended the throne of the papacy he gave me 200 ducats and explained, as the most reverend cardinal of Nicea Bessarion can amply testify, that he had decreed 200 ducats per annum for me; therefore I should remain quietly at Milan, since this money would never cease being paid punctually. But after my visit to Mantua I received nothing but empty phrases.'⁶⁷ These accusations were consequently repeated in several other letters, culminating in the one sent to the new pope Paul II.⁶⁸ These letters were accompanied by equally hateful poems.⁶⁹ Such invectives against a dead pope provoked a resounding scandal at Rome.⁷⁰ The group of Piccolomini cardinals, that is Francesco Todeschini-Piccolomini, Giacomo Ammanati-Piccolomini and

Niccolò Fortiguerra, urged the duke of Milan to dissociate himself publicly from such an outrage by punishing Filelfo. In fact, on 18 November 1464 Filelfo was examined by the duke about these invectives and subsequently imprisoned.⁷¹ The cardinals thanked the duke for this demonstration of justice⁷² which for Filelfo meant five months of confinement in the castle of Milan.⁷³ In the meantime Filelfo's attack upon Pius II had become public, and at least four counter-invectives were written to refute Filelfo's accusations and to denigrate the man who had presumed to debunk the great humanist pope.⁷⁴ Filelfo answered only one of these rejoinders;⁷⁵ perhaps he never read the others.

In order to prevent any further such outburst on the part of Filelfo the duke of Milan had strictly interdicted any more comments on Pius. But the anger conceived after so many disappointments still festered in Filelfo's heart. Towards his friends he could not refrain from continuing to pursue the dead pope with disparaging remarks.⁷⁶ Towards the cardinals, however, his attitude mellowed. After a vain effort to win back the favour of the cardinal of Pavia in 1465,⁷⁷ a second attempt three years later was more successful: Giacomo Ammanati-Piccolomini answered Filelfo's letter in a friendly tone. He said that he had indeed been a little cross with Filelfo for those invectives; but now he offered to reconcile the humanist with the other members of the Sienese 'clan', provided Filelfo was prepared to recant publicly.⁷⁸ Nothing was easier for so volatile a writer: Filelfo wrote back a letter full of panegyric praise of 'the most holy and wisest Pius', promised the 'palinodia' requested⁷⁹ and directly approached Niccolò da Teano⁸⁰ whom he had previously attacked for having taken such a rigidly hostile attitude against the author of the invectives that had slandered Pius II.⁸¹ Later Filelfo explained

that he was now sorry that wrath had overcome reason on that occasion.⁸²

Marco Barbo, the wealthy Venetian, assumed the name Paul II as pope.⁸³ He appeared to Filelfo as 'deus ex machina', for now Filelfo's old dream of going to Rome had another chance of coming true. But these chances were destroyed, despite Filelfo's drumming up all conceivable support,⁸⁴ by the vicious invectives against Pius II. Even the indulgent cardinal of Pavia replied brusquely after having read Filelfo's invectives against his uncle.⁸⁵ In fact, Filelfo's letter to the new pope is an extraordinary mixture of inflamed hatred and most blatant adulation;⁸⁶ even a man of such conceit as Paul II had to feel the obtrusiveness of such flattery, and by attacking his predecessor Filelfo had set a dangerous precedent. Paul II had therefore little reason to be more accommodating towards Filelfo. Yet although Paul II budged as little as his predecessor in not admitting Filelfo into the curia, Filelfo felt a great admiration for the new pope. This was largely due to the pope's generosity in rewarding Filelfo for his translation of Xenophon's 'Cyropaedia', dedicated to him in 1467.⁸⁷ After having finished the work late in 1467 Filelfo announced early in the following year his intention of going to Rome in order to present the book to the pope personally.⁸⁸ Because of an epidemic the visit had to be postponed to autumn 1468,⁸⁹ but by that time rumours about Paul II's proceedings against the Roman Academy had spread to Milan, deterring Filelfo from venturing into the troubled city.⁹⁰ Thus the 'Cyropaedia' was entrusted to Giovanni Arcimboldi who handed the copy over to Paul II recommending emphatically the translator to the pope's munificence.⁹¹ A month later Filelfo told Bessarion that if the pope wanted to acknowledge the gift he could make his reward through the Medici bank.⁹² Yet when Filelfo was informed that the pope had decided to pay him 400 ducats,

he feigned to be surprised, protesting that money had never entered his mind while translating the 'Cyropaedia'.⁹³ It took some time for the money to come through to Milan, so that Filelfo grew impatient;⁹⁴ in his suspicious character he feared being fooled again. But when the sum was eventually paid to him, when he could rest assured that he had not been the victim of empty promises again, Filelfo wrote a letter of profuse thanks to Paul II in which he did not omit a reminder that the pope could do even more by calling Filelfo to Rome.⁹⁵ But however persistently Filelfo kept up his pressure on the curia, particularly on Leonardo Dati, his ex-pupil and now intimate adviser of Paul II,⁹⁶ the goal of securing a position in Rome eluded Filelfo for another seven years. Yet with unbroken perseverance Filelfo continued to hope right until Paul's death.⁹⁷ Despite the undeniable fact that he had once more wasted his flatteries and offerings Filelfo apparently showed not the slightest grudge against Paul II. On the one hand the pope had shown his recognition by paying a generous tribute of 400 ducats; on the other hand Paul II had never made any promise nor had he been very familiar with Filelfo before his election. This distinguished him from his predecessor, who in Filelfo's eyes had been guilty chiefly of rank ingratitude towards the man who had laid the foundations of his career. So even after Paul II's death Filelfo defended him stoutly, especially against the aspersions that emanated from the members of the Roman Academy who now took their revenge.⁹⁸

The next pope, Sixtus IV, instilled for a last time hopes in the aging humanist. Cardinal Francesco della Rovere had been strongly supported by Bessarion in the conclave, his private secretary was Leonardo Grifo, brother of the court physician at Milan and one of Filelfo's favourite pupils,⁹⁹ and on the whole the pope was pledged

to an extremely pro-Milanese policy. Within two years of his election Giovanni Arcimboldi and Stefano Nardini had been created cardinals. Thus a sizeable proportion of patronage at the curia came under Milanese control. Filelfo now hoped that the tide of Milanese ascendancy at Rome would also carry the boat of his own fortunes into a safe harbour. The intermediary at Rome during this time was first Nicodemo Tranchedini, who was succeeded as resident ambassador in the 1470s by Sagramoro Sagramori, bishop of Parma.¹⁰⁰

Immediately after the election of Sixus IV Filelfo started to approach the cardinals again.¹⁰¹ As in 1464 he made frantic efforts to enlist the support of all his friends.¹⁰² Above all, Filelfo proved his political acumen in that one of the first men to be approached by him was Pietro Riario. Filelfo knew well how patronage and nepotism worked together.¹⁰³ Indeed, until his death on 5 January 1474 Pietro Riario was chiefly responsible for the ups and downs in Filelfo's negotiations with Rome. At first everything seemed to work out according to Filelfo's desires. At the end of the year he announced proudly that he had agreed with the pope on a post to be given to him and that he reckoned to move to Rome early in the following year.¹⁰⁴ As it turned out, this optimism was quite unfounded; Filelfo's earlier scepticism had been far more justified.¹⁰⁵ For Sixtus IV had made only a vague promise; there was still a long way to go until a definite offer of employment and a salary could be made.¹⁰⁶ Despite one hitch after another, Filelfo firmly believed that this time he was going to reach his aim.¹⁰⁷ Around the beginning of August 1472 Filelfo received reliable reports from Pietro Riario that the pope considered offering 500 ducats per annum.¹⁰⁸ This offer was accepted with exuberant joy. Filelfo now waited impatiently only for the papal bull to arrive in Milan in order to finalize this agreement.¹⁰⁹

But at the last moment the project fell through once more. As Filelfo disclosed a year later, the offer had been withdrawn since the pope had been told that Filelfo was a decrepit humanist who had no intention of lecturing in the Roman 'Studio'.¹¹⁰ On these grounds the official bull confirming the semi-official promises made by Pietro Riario had never been written. The humiliating disappointment rankled. Filelfo had once more been jilted. The rancour over this defeat is easily recognizable in the letters of 1473.¹¹¹ To Giacomo Ammanati-Piccolomini Filelfo wrote: 'I had thought that learned men would be offered much better conditions under pope Sixtus who is himself a philosopher and eminently trained in praiseworthy disciplines ... But as far as I can see one ought to wish for Paul II to be revived because he was never capable of lying. But I'll restrain myself lest I should appear to have relapsed into writing satires.'¹¹² During his visit to Milan in September 1473 Pietro Riario evidently gave fresh reassurances to Filelfo.¹¹³ But when in November still nothing had been achieved on his behalf, Filelfo denounced bitterly the fickleness and duplicity of the pleasure-loving cardinal.¹¹⁴ In 1474 Filelfo grew positively nasty. Not only in his letters to cardinals did he criticise Sixtus IV's lack of interest in the arts and the evasive procrastination to which the pope resorted,¹¹⁵ he also sharply rebuked the pope's policy towards Todi and Spoleto.¹¹⁶ On the other hand Filelfo still clung to his hopes of getting some employment at Rome with the desperate tenacity with which a drowning man clutches at a piece of straw. Cardinals and other friends of Filelfo at Rome received a continuous stream of supplications.¹¹⁷ Finally the head of the Milanese party at Rome, Giovanni Arcimboldi, prevailed upon the pope to such effect that the official documents were now drawn up and sent to Milan.¹¹⁸ The reasons for this sudden change in papal policy cannot be clearly determined. Why, after three years of delays, should

Filelfo have received such a favourable offer all of a sudden?

Perhaps the death of the all-powerful Pietro Riario early in that year had removed the major obstacle in the path of establishing a predominant position for the Milanese block within the curia. It is almost certain that the invitation for Filelfo to come to Rome in 1474 was not a spontaneous decision, but has to be seen in a wider political context, and that Sixtus IV was not really very enthusiastic about this step which appears to have been to some extent forced upon him. This time the offer was 600 ducats with the expectancy of the first 'scriptorium' that fell vacant.¹¹⁹ After a hasty letter of thanks to Sixtus IV,¹²⁰ Filelfo was on his way on 21 November 1474; before Christmas he was in Rome where he had a splendid reception with so many honours heaped upon him that he for once showed again the sparks of enthusiasm which he had shown in the early days at Bologna and Florence.¹²¹ 'I have only one regret', he wrote to Fabrizio Elfiteo, 'that I delayed my residing in this blissful and most lovely place on earth until the age of almost seventy-seven, so that all my previous life has most unfortunately been wasted because of my stupidity.'¹²² Very soon Filelfo was given the promised 'scriptorium', which brought him probably another 100 ducats p.a.¹²³ His lectures in the 'Studio' met with resounding success,¹²⁴ and Filelfo was enjoying the genial atmosphere of wealth and refined culture, of festivities and pageantry, of dinners with cardinals and of ceremonies in the Vatican.¹²⁵

But on 17 June 1475 he had to return to Milan in order to fetch his family.¹²⁶ He had promised to be back in September.¹²⁷ Unfortunately, the death of his two sons and the serious illness of his wife delayed his return until 4 January 1476.¹²⁸ Since his wife was fatally ill Filelfo wanted to see her on all accounts before her

death.¹²⁹ On 24 April 1476 he therefore left again. This second spell in the papal city was much less spectacular than the first one. Full of premonitions Filelfo felt that something had changed.¹³⁰ The pope did not show the accustomed friendliness, and on one occasion Filelfo was properly bamboozled by him.¹³¹ The reason for this change lay in the strong opposition that had formed itself against Filelfo in the curia. Filelfo was never an easy man to get on with; by his abrupt, irritable nature he was always bound to make enemies. One of the points over which Filelfo clashed with the established bureaucracy at Rome was, of course, money. Somehow Meliaduce Cicada, the papal treasurer, had not paid the full amount of Filelfo's stipend, and this was a point on which Filelfo was oversensitive. Before his return to Rome in 1475 he had already launched an attack on Cicada.¹³² Now in 1476 the salary remained in arrears and when Filelfo insisted on payment he received clipped coins that had been greatly reduced in value.¹³³ The pope himself had finally to make up for some of the arrears out of his private purse.¹³⁴ A few days before his departure in April 1476 the plague had broken out in Rome. The curia had to take refuge in the hills outside the city. Under such circumstances Filelfo saw no point in going back to a plague-ridden city and therefore postponed his return until the epidemic had abated.¹³⁵ But even after he had been given confirmation that the curia had returned to Rome, Filelfo showed no eagerness to take up his duties there again.¹³⁶ He had probably felt the strong wave of hostility against himself that had swept the curia. Also, in the course of this second absence from Rome Filelfo grew increasingly outspoken about Meliaduce Cicada. He warned Sixtus IV against the treasurer in the summer of 1476. Six months later he lashed out against the hated Cicada in an open invective.¹³⁷ In doing so he was probably aware

that he was destroying his position at Rome, but by that time he had made up his mind to stay in Milan anyway. In December 1476 Galeazzo Maria Sforza had been assassinated and now Filelfo saw the opportunity of being reinstalled in his former dignity as court poet. Any further negotiations with Rome, where he was not paid what had been promised, can be regarded entirely as security measures only for the eventuality that he would not get a satisfactory settlement at Milan.¹³⁸ As soon as he could be assured of a living at Milan he lost all interest in returning to Rome, once more disillusioned with the papacy.¹³⁹

The last episode in this story, the ultimate clash with Sixtus IV after the Pazzi conspiracy, has already been told.¹⁴⁰ The chequered history of Filelfo's relations with Rome as well as with Florence reveals not only how much Filelfo's erratic character was responsible for his many disappointments, but also how external events shaped that character, giving nourishment to suspiciousness, bitterness and the crazy desire for prestige which was largely only a compensation for his basic insecurity, for his permanent search for a self-contained identity.

Besides the popes, Filelfo was in contact with a number of cardinals, some of whom acted as generous patrons and intimate friends. First of all Bessarion occupies a preeminent place in Filelfo's correspondence.¹⁴¹ Filelfo confided to him his thoughts and feelings more frankly than to anyone else with the possible exception of Giovanni Aurispa. In well over fifty surviving letters - the actual number of letters written may have easily been three times as large - Filelfo told the Greek cardinal what he really thought about Pius II or court life at Milan, for example.¹⁴² He sent his Greek poetry to Bessarion for criticism and correction,¹⁴³ and in 1458, 1464 and 1471 Bessarion's efforts were particularly valuable in finding a way into the curia for

Filelfo.¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately, no letters have been preserved to illustrate Bessarion's reaction to the humanist of Milan; what can be gleaned from Filelfo's correspondence after 1469 tends to suggest that Bessarion was well aware of the weaknesses and the enormous vanity of Filelfo. In 1469 Bessarion had published his treatise 'In calumniatorem Platonis', directed against George of Trebizond who had dared to attack Plato in order to enhance the authority of Aristotle.¹⁴⁵ A copy of this work was sent to Filelfo who at once enthusiastically applauded Bessarion, although previously he had never shown any deep interest in the dispute of Platonism versus Aristotelianism.¹⁴⁶ But the controversy aroused Filelfo's curiosity now. He read Barlaam's earlier treatise on the same subject¹⁴⁷ and scenting the opportunity of demonstrating his rhetorical capacities he offered to write a devastating invective against George of Trebizond.¹⁴⁸ Bessarion, however, who had strongly disapproved of the earlier feud between Michael Apostolus and Theodore Gaza, restrained the bellicose temper of Filelfo.¹⁴⁹ A literary scandal was the last thing he desired; Niccolò Perotti's invective on this occasion was embarrassing enough.

Bessarion was perhaps the sole humanist whom Filelfo acknowledged as superior. Four encomiastic poems were addressed to him,¹⁵⁰ Filelfo frequently asked for his help in emendating or finding obscure texts,¹⁵¹ and both in 1464 and in 1471 Filelfo sincerely wished him to become pope.¹⁵² In the letters to Bessarion flattery and hypocrisy, otherwise the hallmark of Filelfo's letters to the curia, are noticeably absent.

Among the other patrons of Filelfo in the college of cardinals Giacomo Ammanati-Piccolomini has already been mentioned.¹⁵³ Filelfo had first met him early in 1459 during his brief visit to Rome.¹⁵⁴ Since Filelfo rightly anticipated that this nephew of Pius II would

soon rise to influence and power, he tried to win Ammanati's favour in all possible ways. Filelfo sent him copies of almost all his poetical and rhetorical works which he accompanied with a steady stream of letters.¹⁵⁵ The replies which Filelfo received were scarce compared with the number of letters that were written to the cardinal.¹⁵⁶ Evidently Giacomo Ammanati-Piccolomini did not attribute the same importance to this relationship as Filelfo did. In later years their correspondence became increasingly a one-sided affair in which Filelfo appears to be persistently prodding and begging while the cardinal replies less and less frequently.¹⁵⁷ In 1462/1463 Giacomo Ammanati-Piccolomini was particularly annoyed with Filelfo's threats to take refuge with the Sultan if no appropriate offer was made to him in Italy.¹⁵⁸ Filelfo was quick to deny any such intentions by sending two of his public letters calling for a crusade to the cardinal,¹⁵⁹ but such a degree of inconsistent opportunism was unlikely to win Filelfo much sympathy. For Filelfo good relations with Giacomo Ammanati-Piccolomini were essential, for through the cardinal patronage could be obtained also from other members of the Piccolomini group within the curia. In 1468 it was the cardinal of Pavia who undertook the reconciliation between Filelfo and this group;¹⁶⁰ he was successful at least in one case: Francesco Todeschini-Piccolomini readmitted Filelfo later into his clientele.¹⁶¹

Lodovico Trevisan, the 'cardinal Lucullus', was Filelfo's other great protector in the years of Nicolas V and Pius II.¹⁶² Filelfo had met him in 1434 at Florence and had ever since remained in the cardinal's clientele.¹⁶³ The camerlengo's generosity in supplying money for a dowry or in sending a load of food to the humanist¹⁶⁴ was acknowledged by Filelfo with unusual subservience. In 1459 he promised to write the life of the cardinal of Aquileia and for that purpose Lazzaro

d'Arezzo, the cardinal's agent at Milan, and Gabriel Condulmer, his secretary, were approached to supply information.¹⁶⁵ The great plan was soon forgotten, however. Only in 1465, when it had become apparent that the camerlengo had lost all his influence at Rome as the result of the election of his arch-enemy and rival Pietro Barbo, did Filelfo suddenly revert to this projected biography asking Trevisan's new secretary Francesco Guarnerio d'Osimo to send him some documentary evidence.¹⁶⁶ Why Filelfo should have taken up this idea again in 1465 remains mysterious.

After the death of Lodovico Trevisan, Francesco d'Osimo entered the services of Marco Barbo, Paul II's relative.¹⁶⁷ As in the case of Francesco d'Osimo, Filelfo frequently preferred to approach a cardinal through his private secretary, especially if this secretary had been Filelfo's pupil, as both Francesco Guarnerio d'Osimo and Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene had been. Monetary matters or open petitions for gifts were mostly not entrusted to a formal Latin letter but either committed orally to a messenger or to a separate note in Italian.¹⁶⁸ It is a great loss that none of these Italian letters sent to Rome have survived as they have done at Florence and at Milan, for only these unofficial documents not intended for publication and therefore neither revised nor distorted in their wording afford the most interesting glimpses behind the dressed windows into the real circumstances of Filelfo's life.

Francesco Gonzaga, in 1461 created cardinal at the age of 19, was bound to be Filelfo's maecenas because of his upbringing at Mantua. He had met Filelfo in 1459 after having pronounced before the pope a speech written for him by the Milanese humanist.¹⁶⁹ Filelfo behaved like a mentor to the youthful cardinal; he gave advice as to the books to be read in order to attain a profound humanist culture.¹⁷⁰ Filelfo

acknowledged the cardinal's effective patronage by presenting him with a copy of the 'Cyropaedia', for it was apparent that Paul II's generous response had been largely conditioned by Francesco Gonzaga's strong recommendations of Filelfo.¹⁷¹ In 1474 it was again the cardinal of Mantua, supported by the Milanese group in the curia, who successfully insisted on Filelfo's appointment at Rome. 'For as far as I am concerned, you alone worked most graciously to the effect that I have been appointed by pope Sixtus to a comfortable position in the Roman curia,' Filelfo wrote to him.¹⁷² Most of Filelfo's letters to Francesco Gonzaga were sent through the hands of the cardinal's private secretary Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene who had previously been chancellor at Mantua.¹⁷³ With well over fifty letters from Filelfo to Arrivabene and an equal number of replies - now lost - the correspondence between these two humanists was most regular. Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene kept Filelfo informed about the inside events of the curia and he looked after his old master's interests. It was Arrivabene who broke the news of Crivelli's counterinvective to Filelfo in 1465.¹⁷⁴ When Arrivabene occasionally did not write for some time Filelfo quickly grew impatient and suspicious. But cordial relations were never seriously disturbed. In 1476 Filelfo received an erroneous message from Rome that Arrivabene had died; full of sorrow he wrote to Francesco Gonzaga: 'Since the time during which he was my pupil he always loved and revered me like a father.'¹⁷⁵

Under Sixtus IV Giovanni Arcimboldi rose to a prominent position at Rome.¹⁷⁶ As Filelfo had been his private tutor at Milan, the young Arcimboldi felt greatly obliged to his teacher who had also been a close friend of his father. After the death of his wife in 1467 Giovanni Arcimboldi dedicated himself to an ecclesiastical career. One of the first things he did at Rome, after having been

appointed bishop of Novara early in 1468, was to present to Paul II Filelfo's translation of the 'Cyropaedia'.¹⁷⁷ From 1471 onwards there is a steady stream of letters from Filelfo to Arcimboldi, but they are almost exclusively concerned only with Filelfo's reiterated demands for a place in the curia. When in 1474 Filelfo finally received definite news that he could come to Rome, this offer was as much the result of the steady pressure exerted by Giovanni Arcimboldi on Sixtus IV as the tangible reward for Francesco Gonzaga's eloquent persuasion. Filelfo recognized these efforts on his own behalf in a letter of exuberant gratitude.¹⁷⁸

The other leader of the Milanese group at Rome was Stefano Nardini,¹⁷⁹ created cardinal together with Giovanni Arcimboldi. He had been a friend of Filelfo since his elevation to the archbishopric of Milan in 1463.¹⁸⁰ His influence within the curia, however, was much less conspicuous.

Apart from these personalities with whom Filelfo maintained a steady and frequent correspondence there is a considerable number of further names that deserve hardly less attention even though they appear only sporadically in Filelfo's letters. Among the cardinals there was Nicolas of Cues, whom Filelfo may have met at Milan as the cardinal was on his way between Rome and his diocese; in 1460 Filelfo asked Giovanni Andrea Bussi, then secretary to Nicolas of Cues, to send him a copy of Nicolas's work 'De docta ignorantia'.¹⁸¹ In 1459 Filelfo met Latino Orsini¹⁸² and Prospero Colonna;¹⁸³ Guillaume of Rouen, whom Filelfo met again in Milan in 1469,¹⁸⁴ was equally among Filelfo's correspondents as Jean Geoffroy;¹⁸⁵ Domenico Capranica and Angelo Capranica received letters from the humanist;¹⁸⁶ Bartolomeo Rovarella,¹⁸⁷ Alessandro d'Olivi,¹⁸⁸ Filippo Calandrini,¹⁸⁹ Antoine of Conches,¹⁹⁰ Rodrigo Borgia,¹⁹¹ and of course the two powerful

relatives of Sixtus IV, Pietro Riario¹⁹² and Giuliano della Rovere,¹⁹³ all patronized Francesco Filelfo.

Among the secretaries Biondo Flavio,¹⁹⁴ Niccolò Perotti¹⁹⁵ and above all Giovanni Andrea Bussi, whom Filelfo helped in 1456 in his dispute with Francesco Sforza and who took the lead in introducing the art of printing in Rome,¹⁹⁶ occupied a prominent place among Filelfo's correspondents.

The history of Filelfo's relations with Rome illustrates characteristically an important aspect of humanism: the 15th and the early 16th century in Italy was marked by a new attitude to the poet and to the man of letters. The scholar was accorded an exceptional prestige by virtue of his learning which on many occasions was considered to be much more important in social life than the older virtues like nobility, piety or public office. The poet above all was almost worshipped as a man who held the keys to everlasting fame by virtue of divine inspiration. From a servant, whose duty was chiefly to entertain, the professional poet rose to a position where he became an arbiter in setting the fashion in contemporary literature. Filelfo represents the typical incarnation of this changed image of the poet. He regarded himself no longer as a servant but demanded in his turn to be served by princes and cardinals. It would be difficult to envisage in any other period a bright but by no means exceptional man rising from obscure origins to be almost on an equal footing with popes, bishops and the leading patricians of his day, merely by dint of his pen and his undaunted self-assurance. And such a social position was really Filelfo's ultimate goal in life. We must not be dazzled by the innumerable repetitions of the overriding value of fame; what Filelfo was hankering after was social recognition, prestige among his contemporaries, admiring attention from pupils and princes; he

was not seeking an immortality achieved by toil and self-sacrifice.

8. Naples

When Alfonso of Aragon had been defeated at Gaeta in 1435 his subsequent release in Milan marked a fundamental change in alliances. As a security for the peaceful intentions of king Alfonso, two of his most eminent courtiers remained at the court of Filippo Maria Visconti: Iñigo d'Avalos¹ and Giovanni Olzina.² Thus when Filelfo came to Milan in 1439 these two cultivated noblemen were among his first acquaintances.³ But even before 1439 Filelfo had been in contact with Naples, for Antonio Panormita stayed there since 1435, with whom Filelfo maintained a regular correspondence.⁴ Iñigo d'Avalos played a prominent role in the cultural life at Milan. He became a patron not only of Filelfo but also to other humanists, notably Pier Candido Decembrio. When he finally returned to Naples, Filelfo was clearly interested in not losing the patronage of so noble and generous a man. Through Iñigo d'Avalos a way could also be open to approach Alfonso in order to tap the king's resources as well. It was probably due to these contacts with Iñigo d'Avalos that Filelfo's first poetical work was to be dedicated to king Alfonso. About the same time when the 'Satires' were being finished, Filelfo started negotiations with Iñigo d'Avalos about a personal visit to Naples.⁵ During the political uncertainties over the succession in Milan, however, no definite arrangement about such a journey was possible. After the accession of Francesco Sforza Filelfo thought the time had come for resuming the initiative of preparing his visit to Naples, whose ruler enjoyed the reputation of showing a high regard for humanistic writings and of rewarding lavishly authors and artists.

In fact, Alfonso together with Nicolas V was the only ruler to be remembered with unchanging admiration by Francesco Filelfo. In 1450 the humanist wrote personally to Alfonso; as an answer he was sent a formal invitation and the necessary passports through Iñigo d'Avalos.⁶ But Filelfo's proud announcement that he was going to travel to Naples in August 1451 proved premature. Apart from the plague and Filelfo's escape to Cremona in that autumn, Francesco Sforza simply refused to grant permission for such a journey.⁷ Nothing could be achieved in 1452.⁸ Finally in 1453 Filelfo succeeded in visiting Naples by overstepping the limits of the ducal passports which had allowed him to go as far as Rome.⁹ Yet despite the open hostilities between Milan and Naples at that time the court poet of the Sforza was received with due ceremonial at Naples on 1 August 1453. First Filelfo met Alfonso in Naples, where the copy of the 'Satires' was presented to the king.¹⁰ Then Alfonso retreated to Capua where further meetings were held during which the king not only showed his recognition to Filelfo by paying him 200 ducats, knighting him and placing a laurel wreath on the poet's head,¹¹ but also political affairs were discussed. Filelfo suggested on that occasion a marriage project between Ippolita Sforza and Alfonso's grandson which indeed took place some twelve years later.¹² Well satisfied with the rewards of this journey Filelfo returned after a three weeks' stay at Naples.

A year later Filelfo sent his son Xenophon to Naples in order to introduce him to king Alfonso's munificence.¹³ But on the whole, once Filelfo had achieved his aims of knighthood, laurels and cash, he soon lost interest in Naples. The correspondence with Iñigo d'Avalos stops almost completely for many years, the poems showered upon him and Alfonso cease, and only two Greek poems later record Filelfo's gratitude to the king of Naples.¹⁴ Neither did Filelfo make

new friends among the humanists at Naples, although he must have met there his old friend Gianozzo Manetti and scholars like Giovanni Pontano or Bartolomeo Fazio, by whom Filelfo is in fact mentioned in the lives of famous men.¹⁵ When Theodore Gaza transferred to Calabria, Filelfo received some more news about Neapolitan court life,¹⁶ but Gaza was never a very gregarious man and so a new episode in which Filelfo was drawn into closer contacts with Naples again only came in 1465 when Ippolita Sforza was married to Alfonso of Calabria. Francesco Patrizi came to Milan to escort the bride on her journey while Baldo Martorelli accompanied her as her private tutor.¹⁷ The assassination of Francesco Piccinino occurred shortly afterwards. It greatly shocked Filelfo, although a poem addressed to Piccinino on his departure from Milan suggests that Filelfo had some intelligence of the sinister arrangements between Milan and Naples in this matter.¹⁸

Ferdinand who succeeded his father in 1458 was at first too much occupied with securing his political power. Humanists could not hope for much attention from him. But even after the rebellion of the barons had been crushed, Ferdinand preferred less intellectual pastimes than his father. Filelfo deplored this change with some nostalgia for the good old days of Alfonso.¹⁹ In 1472 there was a temporary revival in the correspondence with Iñigo d'Avalos probably in order to gauge the prospects of employment at Naples, as Filelfo's position under Galeazzo Maria Sforza became increasingly intolerable.²⁰ To this end Filelfo also approached Antonello Petruccio who was responsible for the Neapolitan 'Studio'.²¹ The Neapolitan ambassador at Milan, Antonio Cincinelli,²² as well as the Milanese ambassador at Naples, Giovanni Andrea Canicula,²³ both received letters with similar enquiries from Filelfo. In the following year political tension increased between Milan and Naples, and Filelfo felt called

upon to point out to Ferdinand his duties as a king of one of the states responsible for the political equilibrium in Italy. Filelfo emphasized that any internecine warfare within Italy would only work for the advantage of the Turks.²⁴ Later Filelfo was to write a similar letter to Ferdinand with the same batch of well meant exhortations,²⁵ although such a pose did not stop the humanist from venting quite different feelings in a letter to Galeazzo Maria Sforza in which he called Ferdinand a 'deceitful cruel barbarian'.²⁶

With the exception of the years 1449 to 1453, during which period Naples occupies a prominent place in Filelfo's letters and poems, the capital of the Regno lay normally well beyond the periphery of Filelfo's ken.

9. Smaller Centres of Humanistic Studies in Italy

a) Rimini:

Under the forceful rule of Sigismondo Malatesta, Rimini rose to be a major centre of cultural activities in the 15th century.¹ Filelfo's first contacts with Rimini were probably made in 1433.² Tommaso Seneca who was to play a prominent part in the development of humanism at Rimini had attended Filelfo's classes at Bologna.³ Filelfo also knew Basinio Basini, although no clue exists as to where or when they met.⁴ Relations were given a new impulse with Pietro Pierleoni's return to his native city,⁵ for now Filelfo felt encouraged to introduce himself directly to Sigismondo offering to write the biography of the ruler of Rimini and simultaneously exploring through Pietro Pierleoni what rewards could be expected for such a work.⁶ Both in 1453 and in 1459 Filelfo was the honoured guest of Sigismondo. Filelfo even tried to reconcile him with pope Pius II.⁷ Sigismondo

Malatesta's generosity to Filelfo must have been remarkable, for not only did Filelfo write a panegyric letter in which he extolled the prince's μεγαλοπρέπεια which in Filelfo's eyes was the most outstanding of princely virtues,⁸ he also celebrated Sigismondo in an elaborate Latin poem.⁹ One of the mainsprings of Filelfo's grudge against Pius II was that the pope was waging war against a prince who had proved such a munificent patron to his client Filelfo.¹⁰ Friendly relations were continued with Roberto Malatesta whom Filelfo had first met in 1459.¹¹ In 1476 Filelfo revisited Rimini for the last time.¹²

b) Cesena:

Sigismondo's brother Domenico Malatesta, lord of Cesena, commonly known as Malatesta Novello, was an even greater admirer of Filelfo's genius. Filelfo was so impressed by the fabulous reception prepared for him at Cesena in July and September 1453 that he felt obliged to show his gratitude by dedicating to his new patron the translation of two lives from Plutarch.¹³ When shortly afterwards Filelfo began to collect his casual poetry, the first five books of 'De iocis et seriis' were also dedicated to Malatesta Novello. In 1459 Filelfo revisited Cesena,¹⁴ but after that date nothing more is known about any contacts between Filelfo and Cesena.¹⁵

c) Pesaro:

Not far away from Rimini on the Adriatic coast lay Pesaro, principality of Alessandro Sforza, Francesco's brother.¹⁶ The other five books of 'De iocis et seriis' were dedicated to him.¹⁷ Being a member of the Sforza family, Alessandro felt that he was sharing the responsibility of maintaining Filelfo according to a poet's social rank, and thus Filelfo could reckon with a constant stream of perquisites from Pesaro. In exchange for poetry and orations Filelfo received

from Pesaro some handsome sums of money and various gifts in kind. Particularly in 1470/1471 Filelfo pinned great hopes on the influence Alessandro Sforza might wield over Galeazzo Maria Sforza to the effect that the promised stipend ought to be paid.¹⁸ Gasparino Ardizi, Alessandro's physician,¹⁹ and later Leonardo Botta²⁰ were among Filelfo's correspondents at Pesaro. In 1476 Filelfo visited Pesaro for the last time. Costantino Sforza, Alessandro's son and successor, showed however so little respect for the aging court poet that Filelfo departed on the same day. From Rimini Costantino received a curt letter a few days later in which he was told bluntly that he was obviously mad and totally unworthy of his father.²¹

d) Urbino:

For the last decade in Filelfo's life Federigo da Montefeltre became one of his most important patrons,²² to whom copies of Filelfo's works were sent for his library,²³ who helped Filelfo with occasional gifts,²⁴ to whose court Filelfo recommended many of his friends and whose life Filelfo described panegyrically in the only historical work he ever wrote.²⁵ Ottaviano degli Ubaldini, intimate friend and counsellor of Federigo, had met Filelfo probably early in the 1440s at the court of Filippo Maria Visconti.²⁶ At any rate, Ottaviano was one of the first to receive an autograph copy of Filelfo's 'Consolatio' in 1462.²⁷ Later, Filelfo always wrote jointly to Federigo da Montefeltre and Ottaviano degli Ubaldini. Filelfo had met the lord of Urbino for the first time at Milan in 1462.²⁸ From 1467 onwards Filelfo showed his deference to Federigo in a number of encomiastic letters.²⁹ In 1472 Filelfo contributed to the letters and speeches remembering Federigo's wife Battista who had been a daughter of Alessandro Sforza.³⁰ Shortly afterwards Filelfo began spontaneously to write the biography of the duke of Urbino.³¹ By 1476 this work

was still in progress;³² like so many other projects of Filelfo, it remained unfinished.

After having by-passed Urbino in 1459 on account of adverse weather conditions³³ Filelfo visited Federigo's court and new castle for the first time in 1476.³⁴ Filelfo's ties with Urbino were also strengthened by his recommendation of Demetrius Castrenus in 1468, who was later to become his son-in-law.³⁵ In a letter to Castrenus written in 1470 Filelfo called Urbino admiringly 'the garden of Antinous and the delight of the muses'.³⁶ In 1477 Gian Mario Filelfo came to Urbino upon the recommendation of his father, but he left very soon for Mantua.³⁷

e) Montferrat:

Since Filelfo's visit to Montferrat in 1448³⁸ both John and his son William of Montferrat became Filelfo's patrons,³⁹ whom the humanist frequently approached for various gifts like, for example, horses,⁴⁰ sending in exchange some of his poetry.⁴¹

f) Genoa:

On his tour in 1448 Filelfo had also visited Genoa where he had several friends,⁴² among them Niccolò Ceba whom Filelfo knew since his stay at Constantinople. Filelfo turned to him frequently in his hunt for rare books.⁴³ Among the members of the Campofregoso family, which at that time was most influential at Genoa, was Niccolò who had listened to Filelfo's lectures in Florence.⁴⁴ Filelfo approached him in order to recommend Pietro Pierleoni and Gian Mario Filelfo when they stayed in Genoa.⁴⁵ Tommaso da Campofregoso also appears in Filelfo's correspondence at about the same time.

Filelfo took a great interest in the political events that led eventually to Genoa being reconquered by Milan. He described the French

defeat in 1461 with many details that almost suggest that he heard some eye-witness's account of those events.⁴⁷ When in 1464 Milanese troops under the command of Gaspare da Vimercato entered Genoa, Filelfo celebrated the victory with a long poem.⁴⁸ Some thirteen years later, however, the Genoese's attempt to regain their liberty was looked down upon by Filelfo with the utmost indignation. He advised Cicco Simonetta and Nicodemo Tranchedini that the Genoese were fickle, untrustworthy and therefore fit to be exterminated.⁴⁹

Filelfo also had correspondents in various other places like Ancona, Lucca, Pisa, Viterbo, Verona and Tolentino, but none of these cities was important enough to justify a more detailed account in this context.

10. The Greek Community in Italy

His perfect knowledge of Greek was Filelfo's most valuable possession in his own eyes. He had married a noble Greek girl and in many mannerisms, like wearing a beard, he tried to imitate Greek fashion. Although his actual knowledge of Greek authors may have been rather restricted,¹ Filelfo displayed an enduring curiosity in the origins of the humanists' syllabus, and there he found that almost the entire secular European culture owed its origins to the Greeks. 'What do we have worth mentioning that we did not accept from the Greeks?' he asked Bessarion rhetorically.² Time and again Filelfo insisted that no one could claim a thorough knowledge of Latin unless it was accompanied by a grasp of Greek.³ Filelfo's greatest contribution to the cultural development of the 15th century was his untiring fight for the study and appreciation of the Greek origins of Western Civilisation as against the Roman derivations. He was furious when

after the fall of Constantinople some smug theologians claimed to discover a divine vengeance behind the destruction of 'sc^hismatics'.⁴ The encouragement of Greek studies, the personal contact with the Greek community living in Italy and the special care for the refugees who sought asylum in Italy after 1453 mark Filelfo as a conspicuous protagonist of the Greek component in humanistic studies.

George of Trebizond⁵ had been Filelfo's friend since his arrival at Padua in 1416.⁶ This obviously very close friendship motivated Filelfo in 1453 to intercede on behalf of George in Rome where the Greek had fallen from favour as a result of his superficial translations.⁷ In 1469 Bessarion's treatise forced Filelfo to take sides in the dispute between George of Trebizond and Bessarion, and now the previous friend came under fierce attack from Filelfo.⁸

Next to cardinal Bessarion, who by virtue of his office and because of his erudition towered far above the Greek community in Italy, Theodore Gaza was the closest Greek to Filelfo.⁹ While he had been at Mantua, Theodore Gaza had been introduced to Filelfo by Cato Sacco.¹⁰ At once Filelfo tried his best to find an employment for the Greek scholar either at Milan or at Venice, but in both cases he failed.¹¹ Nevertheless, Gaza reciprocated Filelfo's friendship by copying for him the entire Iliad and Batrachomyomachia in one of the most beautiful and precious greek manuscripts of that century.¹² Filelfo prized this codex so highly that he refused to sell it at any price even to his friend Bessarion.¹³ In the following years a steady exchange of opinions on philological and philosophical topics took place between the two humanists. Of this correspondence at least three letters written by Theodore Gaza to Filelfo have survived. In the first of these Gaza advised Filelfo about the course to be taken in offering the translation of Xenophon's 'Cyropaedia' to

Paul II. From the letter it becomes apparent that Gaza did not share Filelfo's positive opinion on Paul II at all.¹⁴ Answering Filelfo's request to be recommended to Sixtus IV in 1471,¹⁵ Gaza compared Paul II even to Sardanapal.¹⁶ The last letter contains a lengthy explanation of the name and of the origins of the Turks; the question had probably been raised by Filelfo's uncertainty whether one ought to write *τὺρκοις* or *τυρκοις*.¹⁷

Filelfo's esteem for the quiet and assiduous Greek is also reflected in the three Greek poems addressed to Gaza¹⁸ and in the extraordinary praise accorded to Gaza in two letters to Alfonso of Naples¹⁹ and Francesco Barbaro: 'In my opinion only Theodore Gaza is superior to all the other Greeks both in erudition and eloquence; not in that Libanian garrulity, but in that pristine eloquence which was practised by Demosthenes, Aeschines and Lysias.'²⁰

The only other Greek to be spoken of in such laudatory terms by Filelfo was John Argyropoulos.²¹ Filelfo had probably met him at Bologna in 1439, for a year later he sent his son Gian Mario to Argyropoulos's classes at Constantinople. Shortly afterwards he recommended Pietro Pierleoni to Argyropoulos.²² When in 1456 Argyropoulos had emerged as the new professor of Greek at Florence Filelfo wholeheartedly congratulated Donato Acciaiuoli on this choice promising all his support for Argyropoulos's journey to France.²³ In 1457 Argyropoulos returned to Florence passing again through Milan, and from that year onwards there continued a steady exchange of letters between Filelfo and Argyropoulos. Filelfo, for example, recommended pupils to the professor at Florence whose superiority in Greek he frankly acknowledged. When he began to write Greek poetry he asked Argyropoulos for some written work on the quantity of

syllables, since this was a field where Filelfo did not feel sufficiently sure.²⁴ Three of these Greek poems celebrated Argyropoulus.²⁵ When Argyropoulus transferred to Rome in 1471, where he soon held an influential position, Filelfo approached him, too, in order to find some post within the curia.²⁶ The last episode in their friendship is somewhat shady. When Filelfo stayed at Rome in 1475 Argyropoulus dropped several hints that he wanted to return to Florence. Shortly before leaving Rome Filelfo wrote to Lorenzo de' Medici informing him about Argyropoulus's intentions and urging that Florence ought not to miss such an opportunity of winning back such an outstanding teacher.²⁷ During his stay at Florence from 22 to 27 June 1475, Filelfo discussed the project of a return of Argyropoulus with Lorenzo de' Medici and with some other influential men, but for some unknown reason he must have met with a rather determined opposition to this proposal, for from Bologna he wrote to Argyropoulus that the negotiations had failed and that he would now advise Argyropoulus to go personally to Florence if he wanted to achieve anything. In the same sense Filelfo wrote again two months later.²⁸ Now the strange coincidence is that on the same date on which Filelfo seemed to suggest to Argyropoulus that there still was some hope, he recommended Demetrius Chalcondyla for the same job, as Chalcondyla happened to be on his way to Rome and could thus personally present himself at Florence.²⁹ Since we do not know the background at Florence well enough it seems rash to conclude that Filelfo was guilty of duplicity in this affair, particularly since no obvious reason can be found why he should have wished to deceive so old a friend as Argyropoulus.³⁰ Neither is anything known about Argyropoulus's attitude to Filelfo when the latter returned to Rome in 1476. With the available evidence it seems safest to assume that Filelfo, realizing how reluctant

Lorenzo de' Medici was to commit himself to recalling Argyropoulus, took the opportunity of Chalcondyla's journey to Rome for helping someone else to whom he felt equally strongly obliged. Such a recommendation would in no way prejudice Argyropoulus's position, if there had still been a strong interest in Argyropoulus at Florence. That Chalcondyla was eventually elected was less due to Filelfo's recommendation than to the determination of the Florentines not to have Argyropoulus again.

Demetrius Chalcondyla profited thus from Filelfo's recommendations as so many other scholars during this period had done.³¹ In fact, Filelfo had already intervened on his behalf earlier in 1463 in securing for him a position at Padua, and in 1475 Chalcondyla was not only recommended to Florence but also to Milan.³² Filelfo's importance for the formation of a humanistic culture in Northern Italy is revealed by the fact that, when Chalcondyla finally came to Milan in 1491, all the outstanding humanists of Lodovico il Moro's court had been deeply influenced by Filelfo: Chalcondyla, Merula, Piatti, Lodovico himself, the Chalco family, etc.

At Florence Chalcondyla took up the place of Andronicus Callistus³³ who had come to Milan in the same year, probably upon the suggestion of Filelfo.³⁴ Andronicus Callistus had become a friend of Filelfo probably through Palla Strozzi with whom he had been staying at Padua for some time. It was through Palla Strozzi that Filelfo approached him in 1461 asking for some Greek manuscripts in order to copy them. This request was refused by Callistus for no obvious reason.³⁵ In 1462 Callistus went to Bologna where he stoutly defended Filelfo in 1464/1465 against the invectives of Galeotto Marzio da Narni. His diatribes against Filelfo's opponent were so truculent that Filelfo himself had to restrain him, pointing out that

folly only thrived on refutation.³⁶ In 1466 Filelfo congratulated Callistus on being received as a member by Bessarion's Academy at Rome,³⁷ and five years later Andronicus Callistus was appointed at Florence to succeed John Argyropoulus.³⁸

Finally Demetrius Castrenus owed almost his entire career to Filelfo.³⁹ Having come to Italy in 1457 he received at Ferrara, where he was staying at first, an invitation from Filelfo urging him to come to Milan.⁴⁰ As in the case of Porcellio and Gregorio da Città di Castello, Filelfo once more manifested the influence he possessed at Milan over the appointments made in the 'Studio'. A rather curious incident occurred during Castrenus's stay at Milan. When in 1462 he was promoted to the chair of Greek a number of influential citizens obviously feared an undue preponderance of Filelfo in the 'Studio' and drew up a petition requesting the duke to give ~~that~~ chair to Constantine Lascaris rather than to the protégé of Filelfo. That this intrigue aimed more at Filelfo than at Castrenus himself is betrayed by the composition of the signatures, amongst which names like P.C. Decembrio, Lodrisio Crivelli and Bartolomeo da Sulmona can be found. Yet it remains difficult to reconcile with such an interpretation the presence of evidently pro-Filelfians like Carlo Barbavara, Giovanni Mattia Bottigella, Bartolomeo Chalco, Lampugnino Birago and others. Somehow it seems an anti-Filelfian faction had succeeded in enlisting support even among people who were normally friendly to Filelfo. The petition was successful in that on 24 July 1463 Constantine Lascaris was appointed in lieu of Demetrius Castrenus.⁴¹ The professor who had thus been ignominiously demoted by a court intrigue probably remained at Milan as a private teacher. In 1466 and again in 1468 Filelfo tried to find a safe position for him by recommending him to Bessarion. But in both cases he met with

no success, for towards the end of 1468 Demetrius Castrenus took up the offer from Urbino. This offer, too, may have been prompted by Filelfo.⁴² In 1473, however, Castrenus was back in Milan again.

Other Greeks with whom Filelfo was in close contact were his personal scribes, among whom Demetrius Sgouropoulus is the most conspicuous.⁴³ He copied for Filelfo at Milan several Greek manuscripts.⁴⁴ But Filelfo was obviously not entirely satisfied with him, for in 1451 he gave him a very bad reference to Andrea Alamanni, saying that Sgouropoulus was a man 'who had never shown the slightest traces of character or truthfulness'.⁴⁵ After such a slur it is almost incomprehensible that in 1473 Filelfo should have welcomed back to Italy the same person with exaggerated praise, calling Sgouropoulus a man 'thoroughly educated and modest and very well read and learned'.⁴⁶

Apart from such inconsistencies Filelfo distinguished himself by a remarkable concern for the Greeks who had to flee from Constantinople after the fall of the city in 1453. The refugees that received help, hospitality and comfort from Filelfo in those years form an impressive group of representatives of Greek culture which was thus substantially aided by Filelfo. To name but a few of them, Manuel Agalles,⁴⁷ John Gauras,⁴⁸ Nicolas Trachaniotes,⁴⁹ Alexander and Theordore Conan,⁵⁰ Alexander and George Assanes,⁵¹ Andronicus Trychas, George Ducas⁵² and Alphonse of Athens⁵³ received substantial support from Filelfo. It is therefore no exaggeration to claim that Filelfo by way of his personal interests and through his far-flung connections made a most considerable contribution to the spread of systematic and intensive studies of Greek which up to his time had only been taught extremely sporadically in Italy.

11. France

With the natural hostility of Venice against any strong government at Milan and with Frederic III refusing to acknowledge the 'fait accompli' in Lombardy, Francesco Sforza found himself in a dangerous political isolation. A three-pronged attack from France, Switzerland and Venice could easily prove fatal for the new dynasty provided such an attack was well prepared and coordinated. Thus Francesco Sforza realized the need of detaching France from any possible anti-Milanese alliance. By 1451 he gave in to Florentine pressure for a league with Charles VII. Angelo Acciaiuoli, the Florentine ambassador sent to France in 1452, was to negotiate also on behalf of Milan.¹ For Francesco Filelfo, who had become dissatisfied with his economic position at Milan, the opportunity now came of exploiting this political alliance for his own ends. For some time he had compiled a vast dossier on the Turks, and now in 1451 he prepared an elaborate letter for Charles VII in which he pointed out the necessity and the easiness of a crusade against the infidels.² The letter was nothing but a disguised self-recommendation, made in the hope that in France perhaps better patronage could be found than at Milan. This letter was more of a rhetorical flourish than a serious message. In fact, it was not posted before 1455.³ At that time Filelfo was vigorously pursuing a project which he had envisaged only very distantly in 1451: a journey to France in order to offer to Charles VII some of his poetry with a view to winning the king's patronage. Filelfo obviously wished to repeat the successful journey to Naples of 1453 on a larger scale.

In 1453 Filelfo had been approached by Guillaume Jouvenel des Ursins, chancellor of France, through Giovanni Cossa who at that time was Milanese ambassador in France. The Jouvenel des Ursins family

represented at that time the most italophile part of the French nobility. They claimed to be kin of the Orsini of Rome and in their patronage they revealed a distinctive Italian taste.⁴ Guillaume was evidently curious to know more about the famous humanist at Milan, and thus he commissioned Giovanni Cossa to ask Filelfo for a copy of the '*Commentationes Florentinae de exilio*'.⁵ Filelfo was delighted about this opportunity of establishing ties with France; although he had no copy of the required work at hand, he spontaneously sent some of his translations to France which were to be followed later by a copy of the '*Satires*'.⁶

A real interest in this French connection on Filelfo's part cannot be detected much before 1454. Only when the journey to Naples had proved an unqualified success was Filelfo eager to look further afield to repeat such a lucrative venture. This is why in 1454 Filelfo was taking the initiative in promoting his prestige in France. Apart from asking Guillaume des Ursins for confirmation that he had received the works previously sent to him, Filelfo began to recommend Greek refugees to the French royal court, notably to Thomas Coronaeus, a Greek physician in the services of Charles VII who had come to France probably via Milan.⁷ These Greeks were the first in a continuous stream of Greek scholars who crossed the Alps in the following years, including such illustrious men as John Argyropoulus, George of Trebizond and Andronicus Callistus. Almost all of them went via Milan which thus became a chief agent in exporting humanism to France. Filelfo's part in this cultural fertilisation of France is reflected in the number of early editions of his works printed in France. After 1500 the majority of Filelfo editions appeared in French presses. During the years 1455-1456 Filelfo started a proper publicity campaign. No less than eight letters were sent to both

Guillaume des Ursins and to Thomas Coroneus in ten months. At the end of 1455 Filelfo explained what he had in mind: the new collection of lyrical poetry was destined to be dedicated to Charles VII.⁸ That only the first half of this work had been completed did not disturb Filelfo. Perhaps he felt that he had to economize with his poetry. Instead of dedicating 10,000 lines to one single man, as in the case of the 'Satires', it might be more profitable to split such a large work and offer each half to different patrons, as Filelfo did later with 'De iocis et seriis'. By the summer of 1456 Filelfo had become infatuated with the idea of visiting Charles VII. He reckoned to be leaving any day.⁹ The duke's peremptory refusal to grant permission for such a journey was a heavy blow for Filelfo whose correspondence with France fell abruptly to zero for four years.¹⁰ In 1460 and 1461 there was a last flicker in Filelfo's correspondence with Guillaume des Ursins, but since the French chancellor did not reply and soon fell from power, Filelfo thought a correspondence with a man out of power no longer profitable.¹¹

The succession of Louis XI revived Filelfo's hopes of somehow winning the French king's patronage.¹² In the wake of the new entente between Milan and France, forged in 1463, Filelfo finally obtained the duke's permission to go to France. Filelfo intended to present his works not only to Louis XI but also to Philip of Burgundy to whom Filelfo had introduced himself in 1461.¹³ For some unknown reason the project failed to materialize again. Perhaps Filelfo was more interested in hunting a job at Rome after the death of Pius II rather than absent himself beyond the Alps in such a critical moment.

For the rest of Filelfo's life France receded farther and farther from his attention. Certainly no more attempts were made to go to France. True, Filelfo sent another two letters to Louis XI,

but they formed only part of the numerous crusading letters which Filelfo addressed to almost all European rulers in his last years.¹⁴ Official flattery and meaningless exhortations to wage war against the Turks did not stop Filelfo from denouncing Louis XI as a miserable coward in a letter to Ferdinand of Naples.¹⁵ Towards the end of Filelfo's life Burgundy assumes a noticeable importance in his connections.¹⁶ They reflect the fact that at that time a large number of Milanese were serving under Charles the Bold.¹⁷

No other contacts with countries outside Italy were ever made by Filelfo. He had declined the offer to act as an interpreter at the council of Basle where he might have found a number of foreign prelates interested in his work.¹⁸ His brief note attached to a state letter of Francesco Sforza to Luzern cannot be construed as establishing a real link between Filelfo and Konrad Schoch,¹⁹ nor can Filelfo's enquiries about a copy of Albertus Magnus at Cologne count as an indication for more than a casual connection between Milan and the city on the Rhine.²⁰ About England Filelfo had no idea at all. None of Filelfo's pupils ever went abroad for a longer period nor did any of the foreigners who visited Italian universities in the 15th century attend Filelfo's classes. Therefore, although Filelfo's works were soon to be printed all over Europe, his immediate impact upon the burgeoning humanism outside Italy was very slender. With the possible exception of France it could not be compared with the cultural radiation of Enea Silvio Piccolomini, Pier Candido Decembrio or Guarino of Verona.

V. CONCLUSION

In all respects Filelfo's time at Milan forms the most interesting and most characteristic period in his life. Before 1439 he had done little to attain a prominent position in the humanistic movement. He had followed the current fashion by translating from Greek authors and he had acquired a certain notoriety because of his violent satires which he had directed against Cosimo de' Medici and Poggio. The Greek authors he chose to translate were those that were most popular at that time. There was no element of an independent personal judgement involved in this choice. Almost all the works through which Filelfo became famous were written at Milan and somehow reflect his experiences there. Filelfo himself felt almost like a Milanese. In the last decade of his life it becomes apparent how strongly he was attached to that city.

By the time Filelfo arrived in the Lombard capital, Milan had only just received the first impressions of humanism. Before Antonio Panormita's appointment as court poet very little interest in the 'studia humanitatis' can be discovered at Milan. Gasparino Barzizza and Antonio Panormita were the first protagonists of the new studies who influenced a considerable number of leading Milanese citizens. Filippo Maria Visconti himself took little interest in classical languages or literature, but for reasons of political prestige he did not want to lag behind other centres, notably his rival Venice, in the cultivation of learning. He offered therefore a generous patronage to the representatives of the 'studia humanitatis', amongst whom Filelfo was the chief beneficiary of the duke's munificence. Under Filippo Maria Visconti, Filelfo reached the peak in his humanistic career, since he could live a life of material security and social

recognition. At court he was one of the most influential personalities and among the courtiers he was generally regarded as the chief representative of humanistic studies in Lombardy.

The Ambrosian Republic called Filelfo's position seriously in question. Filelfo needed patrons in order to afford the style of life he believed himself to be entitled to, and the establishment of a republican régime which changed every two months provided little prospect for a secure financial position. That is why Filelfo always leaned to the conservative side, seeking above all the protection of Carlo Gonzaga. From the very beginnings of the republic Filelfo had hoped that a monarchy would soon be reestablished, for only a monarchy could provide that amount of patronage which Filelfo needed.

The accession of Francesco Sforza, particularly his claim to have succeeded legitimately, raised Filelfo's expectations of a renewed period of security and comfort. But neither Francesco Sforza nor Galeazzo Maria Sforza were greatly interested in humanism. Filelfo's position as court poet was confirmed at first, but owing to the financial stress of military expenditure the stipend of Filelfo was never paid regularly. Filelfo did not possess any independent sources of income, so he had to rely entirely on what was actually paid to him in cash. For him the twenty-five years, which he spent at the court of the first two Sforzas, were a time of continuous worries over money, of begging and of borrowing. Whereas Francesco Sforza had still displayed a serious will to satisfy Filelfo's demands, Galeazzo Maria Sforza would have preferred to remove Filelfo from his court. Both dukes, however, did not want Filelfo to leave, since they realized the need of securing some favourable publicity for themselves by offering patronage to such a famous representative of humanistic learning. The character of Filelfo's works which he wrote during

that time reflects his suffering from lack of recognition and his permanent preoccupation with somehow finding a sufficient income.

Filelfo was thoroughly a 'social animal'. He was never a deep thinker or an original poet. The same phrases recur time and time again in his letters and in his poetical works. His learning was exclusively reproductive. Basing himself on a large library and a phenomenal memory he could draw on a certain stock of phrases, but he never coined a new expression or formulated an original idea. There is no evidence to suggest that he took an interest in extending his knowledge of classical authors in his later years. Filelfo went in for easy mass production of poetry and humanistic writings. His undeniable stylistic talent always tempted him to confine his efforts to polished rhetoric and to formal correctness in poetical metric. He obviously never gave much thought to the contents of what he wrote. Driven by ambition he wanted to reap recognition. The humanistic profession was for him first of all an alley for a parvenu to social prestige. In the absence of a strong, independent character and of any detachment from his own environment, Filelfo was always eager to conform. His nervousness and psychological instability required permanent props from outside. Acclaim and admiration from contemporaries were his highest aims in life. In this desire for recognition Filelfo quite logically assumed that as a poet he had no greater service to offer to princes or friends than shroud them in this haze of flattery which was so much a necessary element in his own life. Hence most of his poetry is panegyric, addressed personally to somebody he wished to impress. The entire work of Filelfo is therefore much more interesting as a mirror of the social framework in which it was composed, than as a literary product as such. Filelfo lived in a closely knit network of relations with

almost all men of importance of his time; if he wrote something, he did so with the aim of influencing somehow these relationships, be it by winning a friend or impressing a prince; Filelfo never wrote in order to express an idea or an experience. Throughout his life he tried to foster a certain 'image', he was working to create his own myth of Filelfo, the 'vates'.

Filelfo's popularity on the height of his success as a poet, that is to say from about 1450 to 1470, was truly enormous. His works were in constant demand; witness the immense number of Filelfo manuscripts that still survive. In his time Filelfo must have been something like a bestseller author. His poetry set the fashion for several years among a host of lesser poets. His 'Sforzias' was imitated at least half a dozen times in similar epics which tried to turn the rulers of Mantua, Florence, Rimini or Urbino into Homeric heroes. Tito Vespasiano Strozzi, Lodovico Carbo, Antonio Tebaldeo, Piattino Piatti, Lorenzo Vitelli, Ugolino Verini, Cantalicio and many others acknowledged their indebtedness to the Milanese master.¹ After his death Filelfo was praised by several other poets.² In a way, Filelfo embodied much more typically the average level of the cultural milieu of the early Italian Renaissance, whereas a really creative personality would have transcended his own time. An epoch is frequently better presented by the characters of second or third rank than by those outstanding personalities that were already exceptional even in their own times. Francesco Filelfo is no doubt such a figure of second rank. What makes him interesting is his ability to become completely the mirror of the aspirations, the tastes and the way of life of the educated classes of fifteenth-century Italy. The more an independent individual reasserts itself, the less it is likely to be typical of its environment. It tends to shape

events rather than be entirely shaped by them, as Filelfo certainly was. If we tend to regard Lorenzo Valla or Leon Battista Alberti as the most characteristic representatives of the ideals of humanism, such an identification stands in need of some qualification. For our perspective the greatest people are the best representatives of the development of human civilisation, but for their contemporaries the set of values may have been fundamentally different. Alberti and Valla, for example, were by all standards exceptional men even in fifteenth-century Italy. The majority of their contemporaries took comparatively little notice of them. For them the great celebrities were people like Filelfo whose works were easy to read and unencumbered by original, maybe challenging thoughts. What strikes us as narrow, stereotyped platitudes, as stale puns and poor witticisms, was loved by Filelfo's contemporaries as enjoyable entertainment. At Milan, for example, we find Filelfo at the centre of a circle of rising professional men of the upper middle classes who deeply admired Filelfo's work. They were easily impressed by formal brilliance and paid little attention to the substance. Up to a point humanistic studies were for many of them what hunting and feasting had been for the nobility. Classical learning was a pastime appropriate for people of a certain social rank, but it was rarely taken very seriously. Because Filelfo never met a patron with serious tastes, he never reached a sufficient level of detachment from the current fashions for his poetry to reflect deeper human experiences and thus to acquire enduring value. Filelfo wanted to entertain. His superficiality and vanity made his works easily accessible to his contemporaries, but the more he consciously tried to build up a lasting fame the less likely he was to attain it. He did not know that fame cannot be bought by conscious effort. He wrote for common consumption, but

as soon as he was dead he was quickly forgotten.

Filelfo's contribution to the development of humanism as a whole consisted in the impetus he gave to the growth of humanistic tastes in a wide section of Milanese society and in his efforts to lead people to appreciate the Greek origins of classical civilisation. He was an important populariser. In his efforts to teach Latin and Greek he made classical learning accessible to a wide audience and fulfilled thus, as it were, the function of a journalist. The 'Convivia' exemplify this tendency in Filelfo's writings to popularise encyclopaedic knowledge. Through Filelfo's close ties with more than one generation of almost all the leading Milanese families a certain way of living, hitherto confined to a small élite of academics at Pavia, took firm roots in the upper ranks of Milanese society. Filelfo's share in preparing the ground on which the cultural activities of the court of Lodovico il Moro could blossom must not be underestimated. Similarly Filelfo left deep imprints in many other centres of humanistic studies, most notably, perhaps, in Venice and Bologna. Also the increasing awareness of the essential importance of a perfect grasp of Greek for humanistic studies must be traced back, at least in part, to Filelfo.

Until about 1500 Filelfo's works were still widely read, but then the series of further prints breaks off abruptly, and with the exception of 'De morali disciplina' and the 'Fables' practically no work was printed after 1535.

Desiderius Erasmus still recorded Filelfo among the great names of Italian Humanism; in fact, he had been first induced to translate Euripides by the extract from 'Hecuba' translated by Filelfo in his 'Consolatio'.³ But Erasmus already criticized Filelfo's vanity. Similar judgements were made by Lilio Gregorio Giraldi and Paolo

Giovio.⁴ After 1550 Filelfo was practically forgotten, and when interest in this central figure of the early Italian Humanism was revived by Carlo de' Rosmini it was only on an academic level. And more than merely academic interest Francesco Filelfo will probably never command.