Dr Ruggero Sciuto
Leverhulme Early Career Fellow
University of Oxford

The Correspondence(s) of Count and Countess Lorenzi: What was the Extent of an Early Modern Ambassadress' Autonomy?

Ruggero Sciuto[1]

(St Edmund Hall, University of Oxford)

Abstract

Scholarship aiming to reassess the role played by the wives of early modern ambassadors normally draws on two different kinds of sources: diaries and correspondences. Those who base their analysis on letters are usually compelled to look at their ambassadresses through the eyes of a third party, be it the ambassadress' husband or any other members of his epistolary network. The personal archives of Count Luigi Lorenzi, French resident minister to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany from 1735 to 1765, are in this sense exceptional, as they contain not only hundreds of letters addressed to Luigi's wife, Countess Minerva Ughi, but also drafts of many of her letters. Crucially, most of these drafts bear clear marks of Luigi's intervention and some of them even appear to be entirely in his hand.

In this paper, I shall ask whether Luigi's intervention in his wife's letter writing practices is indicative of her lack of autonomy or diplomatic importance, concluding that Minerva's letters (and conceivably Luigi's, too) are best interpreted as the result of the joint efforts of a 'diplomatic working couple', simultaneously acting in the best interest of the household and of the sovereign (or state) they represented. Even so, Minerva's (and Luigi's) drafts remind us that we ought to be extremely careful when analysing the diplomatic activity of early modern ambassadresses and diplomatic agents more broadly. They further invite us to reconsider the notion that we can categorically distinguish between women's and men's correspondences, prompt us to question the extent to which early modern diplomacy was gendered, and also encourage us to reflect on the possible links between diplomacy and literature.

Keywords: diplomacy; gender; diplomatic couples; ambassadresses; letter writing; Luigi Lorenzi; Minerva Ughi; eighteenth-century; France; Grand Duchy of Tuscany

Dr Ruggero Sciuto
Leverhulme Early Career Fellow
University of Oxford

Introduction

With the recent advent of New Diplomatic History, the number of publications linking together diplomacy and gender studies has grown remarkably. Among the many effects brought about by this heretofore almost unthinkable combination is a growing understanding of the diplomatic role played by early modern ambassadorial wives and partners more broadly. Many of these publications, however, share a methodological problem: whether they base their analysis on letters or on different kinds of sources, such as diaries, scholars are normally compelled to look at their ambassadresses – by which term, following an established early modern convention, I here mean 'wives of ambassadors' – through the eyes of a third party, be it the ambassadress' husband or any other members of his (epistolary) network.[2] Cases like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's are regrettably rare, and working directly on an ambassadress' letters remains the privilege of an imperial few.[3]

The personal archives of Count Luigi Lorenzi, French resident minister to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany from 1735 to 1765, are in this sense exceptional, as they contain not only hundreds of letters that he received from his wife, Countess Minerva Ughi, but also her passive (i.e. incoming) correspondence and drafts of many of her outgoing letters. Several of Minerva's drafts, however, bear clear traces of Luigi's interventions, and some even appear to be entirely in his hand. In addition to these drafts, several other documents in the Archivio Lorenzi seem to point to Minerva's lack of autonomy as a letter writer, suggesting that, contrary to what the most recent historiography has argued, early modern ambassadresses may have been largely dependent on their husbands and played little political or diplomatic role of their own.

In this paper, I shall ask whether Luigi's intervention in his wife's letter writing practices is indicative of her lack of autonomy or diplomatic importance, concluding that Minerva's letters (and conceivably Luigi's, too) are best interpreted as the result of the joint efforts of a 'diplomatic working couple', simultaneously acting in the best interest of the household and of the sovereign (or state) they represented.[4] Even so, Minerva's (and Luigi's) drafts remind us that we ought to be extremely careful when analysing the diplomatic activity of early modern ambassadresses and diplomatic agents more broadly. They further invite us to reconsider the notion that we can categorically distinguish between women's and men's correspondences, prompt us to question the extent to which early modern diplomacy was gendered, and also encourage us to reflect on the possible links between diplomacy and literature.

Luigi Lorenzi and his Letters

Although little known, Luigi Lorenzi, count of Lorenzana, Colle Alberti, and Tremoleto, was an important figure on the eighteenth-century diplomatic scene.[5] Appointed French resident minister to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in 1735, he retained this post until 1765, when Peter Leopold of Habsburg-Lorraine's arrival in Florence and the Grand Duchy's subsequent increase in geo-political importance induced Louis XV to send a French-born ambassador to Florence.[6] Over the 30 years of his tenure, Luigi corresponded extensively with key figures in French politics, such as the duc de Praslin, the marquis d'Argenson, the cardinal de Tencin, and the duc de Nivernais, as well as with other French envoys across the Italian peninsula and beyond. He was a crucial source of information for the French government, and his services became particularly important during the War of the Austrian Succession and again in the

1750s, at the time of the Corsican rebellion lead by Pasquale Paoli. In recent research, Lorenzi has begun to emerge as a crucial node in mid-eighteenth-century Franco-Italian cultural networks, fostering contacts between his correspondents and significantly contributing to the spread of the ideas of the French Enlightenment in the Italian peninsula. Besides ministers and fellow diplomats, Luigi exchanged letters with antiquarians, scientists, and men and women of letters, including Montesquieu, Voltaire, the economist and collaborator on the *Encyclopédie* André Morellet, the poet and playwright Anne-Marie du Boccage, the essayist Nicolas-Charles-Joseph Trublet, the explorer, mathematician, and active supporter of smallpox inoculation Charles Marie de la Condamine, and the physicist and astronomer Ruggiero Giuseppe Boscovich.[7] Lorenzi was also an eclectic thinker: a fervid admirer of Pufendorf, Grotius, and Castel de Saint-Pierre, he had a solid knowledge of political theory and international law; he was a member of several learned societies in Tuscany, Umbria, and Romagna, and even wrote essays on antiquarianism.[8] Whether one conceives of the Republic of Letters as a mainly academic network, as Anne Goldgar does, or as a much broader web of intellectuals, as Dena Goodman and Laurence Brockliss do, Lorenzi undoubtedly played a major role within it.[9]

Luigi Lorenzi's extensive correspondence, today at the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, consists of more than 50,000 documents divided into several folders, each one roughly corresponding to a period of 6 to 12 months. Within each folder, letters are ordered neither chronologically, nor thematically, nor by correspondents, and while the binders themselves arguably date from the late 20th century, when the Lorenzi family papers entered the Archivio di Stato, nothing suggests that the order of the documents within each folder may have changed significantly over the past 250 years. On the contrary, extensive research conducted on various individual correspondences (e.g. those with Morellet, Trublet, and La Condamine)

has not revealed any sizable gaps, suggesting that the Archivio Lorenzi may have in fact remained virtually untouched since the ambassador's death in 1766.

Minerva Ughi and her Letters

Minerva Ughi was born in 1731 to an ancient Florentine family that had been quite powerful in the sixteenth century.[10] She married Luigi Lorenzi in 1750 and had 4 children with him, whose names (Isabella, Francesco, Luigi, and Luisa) reflect the remarkable network of royal and imperial protectors of which the Lorenzi family could boast.[11] Two entire folders of the Archivio Lorenzi are devoted to Minerva's passive familial correspondence, and at least 200 of her letters to Luigi can be found in various folders of the Archivio Lorenzi, suggesting that the diplomat did not see them as distinct from his official correspondence. As justly pointed out by Lynne Magnusson, after all, in the early modern period the boundaries between the administrative and private spheres were even blurrier than they may be today.[12]

While not gathered in a single file, Minerva's extant letters to her husband are easily recognisable (fig.1): normally penned on small fragments of low-quality paper and dated from Montughi, a small village at the outskirts of Florence where her family owned a villa, these letters are consistently written in Italian, with French only used in the opening and closing salutations. Judging from some of these salutations (for example the ones in the letter figured below: ('Ma tres cher moitie'), Minerva's control over French spelling may appear insecure. One must bear in mind, however, that eighteenth-century spelling conventions were extremely flexible, and that Minerva's standards do not differ significantly from those of other high-ranking eighteenth-century letter writers, both male and female, French or otherwise.

Dr Ruggero Sciuto
Leverhulme Early Career Fellow
University of Oxford

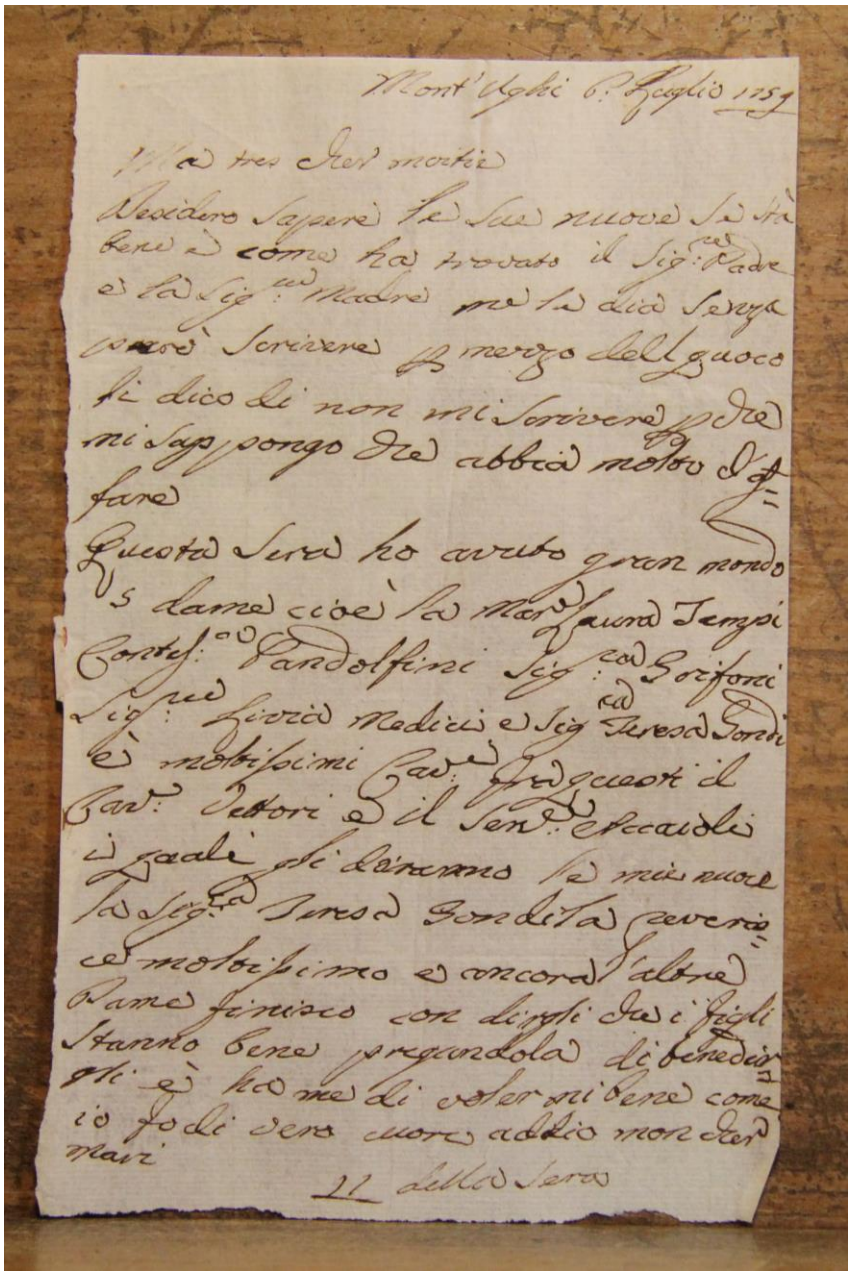

Figure 1: Letter from Minerva Ughi to Luigi Lorenzi dated 6 July 1759

(Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Fondo Lorenzi, folder 69).

In addition to her familial correspondence, scattered among Luigi's papers are also hundreds of letters that Minerva received from various aristocrats, both French and Italian. The list of Minerva's correspondents includes, among others, Marie Louise Elisabeth, eldest daughter of Louis XV and Duchess of Parma as wife to Infante Philip; Annetta Malaspina della Bastia,

lady in waiting to the Duchess of Parma; Etienne-François, duc de Choiseul, French ambassador to Rome and later minister of Foreign Affairs; or the marquise de Gonzales, governess to Isabella of Parma and active informer for the then king of Spain, Ferdinand VI. Another woman, Petronilla de Ligneville, Duchess of Calabritto, is certainly worth a brief mention here, for her letters to Minerva are lavishly decorated, in stark contrast to the letters that she addressed to Luigi, which are rather anodyne.[13] While the elaborate pastoral frames or the colourful contours of some of the letters that Minerva received from the Duchess of Calabritto may not carry any particular diplomatic or political meaning, they nonetheless remind us of the importance of the material aspects of early modern letters, while also prompting us to investigate whether (or to what extent) eighteenth-century epistolary etiquette was gendered.[14]

Not only does the Archivio Lorenzi preserve Minerva's familial correspondence, both active and passive; not only does it preserve the letters that she received from many noblemen and noblewomen; scattered among its folders, are also drafts of letters that Minerva addressed to various high-ranking correspondents.

Minerva's Drafts

While some of Minerva's drafts are indeed in her hand, others, somewhat puzzlingly, are not.

Dr Ruggero Sciuto
Leverhulme Early Career Fellow
University of Oxford

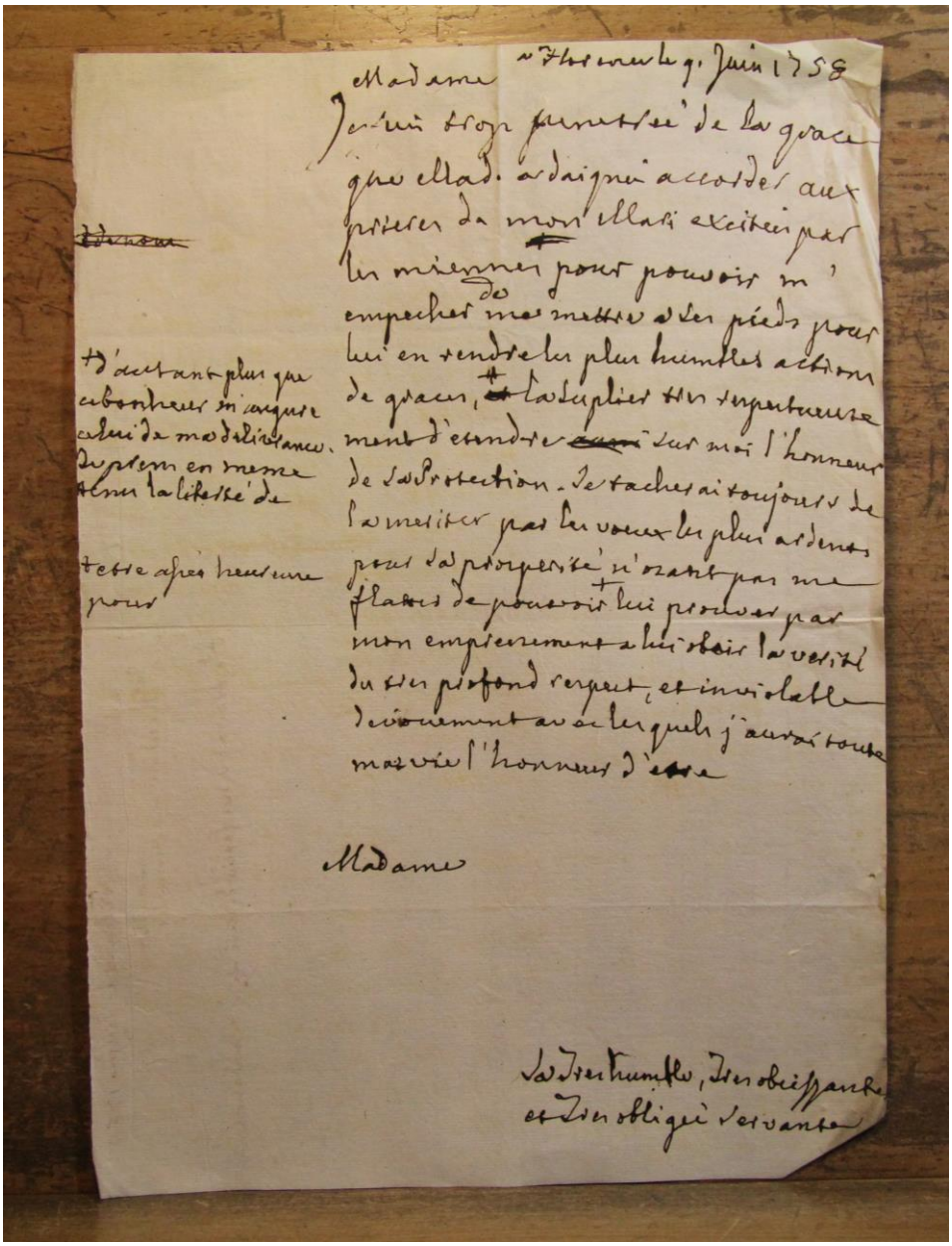

Figure 2: Draft of a letter from Minerva Ughi to Marie Louise Elisabeth of Parma dated 9 June 1758

(Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Fondo Lorenzi, folder 66)

The draft illustrated in fig.2 is dated 9 June 1758 and, as various elements in the text as well as in the surrounding letters make clear, it was addressed to the abovementioned Marie Louise Elisabeth of Parma. The draft is understandably unsigned, but the salutations in the bottom-right corner ('Tres humble, tres obeissante et tres obligée servante' – 'most humble,

most obedient, and most obliged servant', in the feminine) dispel all doubts: the letter was to be sent by Minerva. This is confirmed by the text itself, in which gratitude is expressed for 'the favour that you, Madam, deigned to grant us upon the request of my husband' ('la grace que Mad. a daigné accorder aux prieres de mon Mari'). The handwriting, however, is not Minerva's. It is not even that of François Morellet, Luigi's secretary at the time when this letter was sent.[15] Instead, as an analysis of other documents in the Archivio Lorenzi immediately reveals, the draft is in Luigi's own hand (see fig.3).

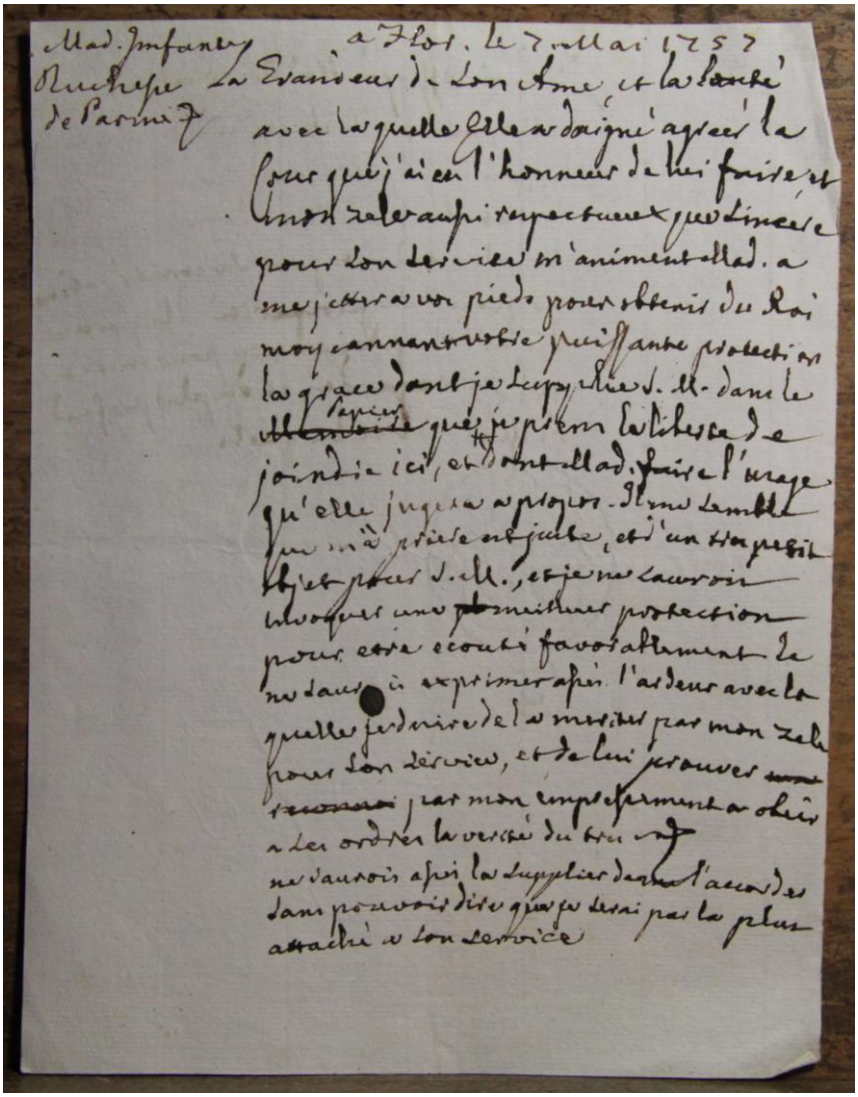

Figure 3: Draft of a letter from Luigi Lorenzi to Marie Louise Elisabeth of Parma of 7 May 1757

Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Fondo Lorenzi, folder 63

Documents like the one we just discussed are by no means rare in the Archivio Lorenzi. Another interesting example, perhaps not as extreme, is offered by a draft dated 15 August 1760.[16] This draft is addressed to a 'Stimatissima Signora Principessa', whom Minerva is congratulating on being appointed lady in waiting to Elisabeth Farnese of Spain. Unlike the previous letter, this one is written in Italian and is in Minerva's own handwriting. Nevertheless, close examination reveals that Luigi read the letter before it was sent and altered the text in several places: he replaced, for instance, Minerva's opening sentence ('Con infinito piacere ho ricevuto […] la notizia che la Regina Madre la presa […] per sua Dama' – 'It is with extreme pleasure that I received the news that the Queen Mother took you as her Lady in waiting') with the more formal 'Con infinito piacere ho ricevuto [...] la notizia che la Regina Madre gli ha conferito [...] l'impiego di sua Dama' ('It is with extreme pleasure that I received the news that the Queen Mother has appointed you to the position of her Lady in waiting').

A letter that Minerva sent to her husband on 24 November 1758 ought to be quoted here too, for it sheds additional light on Minerva's autonomy (or rather 'lack of autonomy') as a letter writer:

> I spent most of this evening working and the rest writing. Perhaps I shall still read a bit. On re-reading the letter from the Abbé de la Galaisier I had the impression that he was suggesting that, if I were to write to him, I should address my first letter to Venice. If you think it proper for me to reply, send me the draft and I shall either post it or send it back home, as you prefer. I am attaching the Abbé's letter to this one of mine so that you can do whatever you find most appropriate because I desire to oblige you.[17]

> (Questa sera lo passata la più parte a lavorare e l'altra a scrivere[.] Forse leggerò ancora un poco. Mi è parso nel rileggere la lettera dell'Abate de la Galaisier che egli mi dica d'indrizargli la mia prima lettera[,] se gli scrivevo[,] a Venezia[,] onde se lei crede che sia proprio rispondergli, mi mandi l'abbozo che [...] la manderò alla Posta ò in Casa come ella vuole[.] [...] Io includerò in questa quella del detto Abate accioche Ella faccia quello che Ella crede più proprio poiche io desidero di dargli nel genio.)

In short, Minerva is asking for her husband's permission to enter into an epistolary exchange with a third party, the young French abbé Barthelemy Louis Martin Chaumont de La Galaizière, who, at the end of the 1750's, was travelling across the Italian peninsula with his tutor (and brother of Luigi's secretary), the abbé André Morellet. What is more, Minerva is suggesting that her husband should pen a draft that she would then transcribe. The phrase 'la manderò alla Posta ò in casa' ('I shall either post it or send it back home') is particularly worthy of attention, as it suggests that Minerva is considering the option of sending back to her husband her transcription of his draft, for him to check and then, possibly, post.

In light of these observations, Minerva's independence as a diplomatic actor appears significantly diminished. In her *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, Dena Goodman interestingly links together the practice of letter writing and the notion of independence.[18] 'In all cultures', she writes, 'writing is a form of power and a basis of social distinction. Because it allows a person to withdraw into him or herself, writing also facilitates the reflection through which personal autonomy is attained, or at least experienced. […] Writing letters and engaging in correspondence', she continues, 'helped women to achieve moments and degrees of autonomy within the context of human relationships'.[19] Minerva's lack of autonomy as a letter writer would therefore represent an obstacle to the emergence and establishment of herself as a subject and reveal a more profound lack of independence on a social level. Using

a term drawn from feminist theory, one could say that Minerva was at least partly denied 'relational autonomy', meaning the sort of autonomy that selves attain in the context of social relationships.[20] More generally, Minerva's letters appear to stand in the way of the most recent historiography's attempts to re-evaluate the diplomatic activity of early modern women. Indeed, they would seem to stand as a warning to those who might try to interpret a small number of extant sent letters as evidence of an ambassadress' diplomatic agency: in the absence of autograph drafts, Minerva's case seems to warn us, how can we be sure that an ambassadress' letters were not actually written by her husband, or a secretary?

Attaining Epistolary Control

While some of Minerva's drafts and letters may indeed suggest that she lacked autonomy as subject, diplomatic agent, and letter writer, other documents in the Archivio Lorenzi point in a different direction and show that the above statement should in fact be opportunely nuanced, if not fully rejected.[21]

A reappraisal of Minerva's case should arguably start with the acknowledgment that, as must have been the case for her husband, too, her familiarity with diplomatic and epistolary practices gradually increased over the years. Recent scholarship has shown that ambassadresses often carried out diplomatic activities in their husbands' absence, or in the time between their husbands' death and the appointment of a new ambassador. In his essay in this collection, Florian Kühnel looks at the interesting case of Anne-Marie de Pontac, wife of Gabriel-Joseph de Lavergne, comte de Guilleragues, French ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in the late 1670s and until 1684, who actively fought against her deceased husband's secretary over the right to carry out diplomatic activities until Pierre Girardin's arrival in

Istanbul.[22] A similar case is offered by Lucy Boyle, wife of George Byng, 4th Viscount Torrington, British minister plenipotentiary in Brussels at the time of the outbreak of the French Revolution, who, as argued by Jean-Charles Speeckaert in this special issue, ensured the normal operation of the embassy in her husband's absence.[23]

To be sure, Minerva's case is unlike the ones just mentioned: for one thing, Luigi hardly ever left Florence, and nothing suggests that Minerva may have been entrusted with important diplomatic activities on the rare occasions when he was. For another, Luigi did not die in service: as previously remarked, he was dismissed from employment in 1765, and before the arrival in Florence of his successor, the marquis de Barbentane, it was the French consul in Livorno, Pierre Jean de Bertellet, who took up his functions.[24] Nevertheless, an analysis of the documents in the Archivio Lorenzi reveals that, following Luigi's death, Minerva proved perfectly capable of autonomously negotiating a pension for herself and high-ranking positions in the army for her two sons. Her letters from this period, addressed, amongst others, to the duc de Choiseul, show a secure command of the language of French bureaucracy and a good familiarity with epistolary etiquette and negotiating practices. Of course, one could imagine that she was assisted by a secretary, but nothing in the extant documents appears to point in that direction. We may therefore assume that, at least by the time of her husband's death, Minerva had gained perfect control over letter writing and negotiating skills.

The hypothesis of Minerva's gradual familiarisation with the language and practices of diplomacy is confirmed by a letter that the ambassadress received on 26 November 1752 from her brother-in-law, Orlando Lorenzi, who lived in Paris, attended many of the local salons, and corresponded with both Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert.[25] In this letter, Orlando compliments his sister-in-law on her rapid progress in the study of the

French language, a skill which, he points out, is absolutely crucial to the wife of a French ambassador: 'My compliments to you on your progress in the French language. I do not find it surprising, but I am indeed very pleased, for this language is almost as necessary to you as if you were living in France' ('Je vous fais mon compliment sur votre progré dans la langue francoise. Je n'en suis pas surpris mais j'en suis fort aise car cette langue vous etoit quasi aussi necessaire que si vous habitiez la France').[26] This letter shows that, prior to the end of 1752, and at least in the eyes of a non-native speaker (although, admittedly, a very fluent one), Minerva's control over the French language was still susceptible of improvement.[27] If confirmed, this may at least partly explain Luigi's decision to personally draft some of the French letters that Minerva sent in the 1750s, as well as the ambassadress' greater independence in penning her Italian letters, which, as previously mentioned, only show traces of Luigi's revisions.[28]

While arguably true, the hypothesis of Minerva's gradual familiarisation with diplomatic (epistolary) etiquette and the French language is not in itself sufficient to make perfect sense of her case. As shown in previous paragraphs, Luigi's control over Minerva's French correspondences was still very strong at the end of the 1750s, a time by which we ought to suppose that our ambassadress had become proficient in the French language and familiar with both epistolary etiquette and diplomatic practices.

A Diplomatic Working Couple

Consider now a letter that Minerva sent to her husband in 1760: 'My dearest half', she writes, 'as you can see, I have written the letter to Albergotti. Seal it and send it to him. I removed a few words, which I thought were overly strong; if you want me to reinsert them, I shall write

the letter again by tomorrow morning. Otherwise, just send it today' ('Ma tres chere moite, Ho fatta la lettera per Albergotti come sel potrà vedere[.] Vi faccia il sigillo e gliela mandi. Ho levato alcune parole perche mi parevono troppo forti se vuole chio cele metta, la scriverò novamente per domattina[;] se no gliela mandi oggi').[29] What this passage suggests is that Luigi may have sent a draft of a letter to Minerva, who was then in Montughi, asking her to transcribe it and send it back to him. Regrettably, it is impossible to establish with certainty whether the draft that Minerva transcribed had been composed by the ambassador or was instead a revised version of a letter that she had originally written herself. Be that as it may, the identity of the addressee suggests that the draft might have been in Italian, rather than French.[30] Minerva must have transcribed the letter shortly after receiving it, but rather than merely copying it, she crucially decided to make a few amendments ('I removed a few words, which I thought were overly strong'). She then sent her transcription of the letter to her husband, leaving him the choice either to accept her changes and send the letter, or reject them and send the letter back to her, to be transcribed again.

This document seems to stand in the way of a simplistic interpretation of Minerva as completely lacking autonomy as a letter writer. Rather, it calls for a reconsideration of her entire case: not only can one discern a gradual development in Minerva's control over diplomatic language and practice; at least in the 1760s but arguably throughout her career as an ambassadress, Minerva actively collaborated with her husband.

In *L'Ambassadrice et ses droits*, Friedrich Carl von Moser presents the collaboration between a diplomat and his wife as absolutely natural. As he puts it in a passage that is well-known among specialists:

> I do not see why an Ambassador, on certain occasions, should not open his heart to his wife, who, thanks to her sharpness, delicacy, and insight, which is specific to her sex, can be in a position to offer him ideas with which he would not come up on his own. Why should he not seek the advice of the most trustworthy among his friends, of her who is most dear to him than anyone else in the world?
>
> Je ne vois pas […] pourquoi un Ambassadeur en de certains cas ne pourroit pas s'ouvrir à son épouse, qui à la faveur d'un esprit de finesse & de pénétration, qui est particulièrement propre au beau sexe, peut être en état de lui donner un avis qu'il ne trouve pas chez soi. Pourquoi ne pourroit-il pas prendre conseil d'une personne qui est la plus affidée de ses amies, & celle qui le touche de plus près dans le monde ?[31]

Several recent publications have shown that, in Ancien Régime Europe, ambassadors did in fact sometimes work in close collaboration with their wives. In an article appeared in 2017, Florian Kühnel looked at two diplomatic couples, Edward and Mary Wortley Montagu and Elizabeth and William Trumbull, to make the point that, in fact, it was relatively common for early modern ambassadors and their wives to form what he calls 'diplomatic working couples', simultaneously and jointly acting in their own interest and in that of the monarch (or country) they represented. The same point is made by Laura Oliván Santaliestra in another article, also published in 2017, that looks at the history of seventeenth-century Hispano-German diplomatic relations, and at the embassies of Franz Eusebius von Pötting and Ferdinand Bonaventura von Harrach, more precisely.[32] Diplomatic working couples, it would seem, were therefore relatively common in the whole of Europe throughout the early modern period.[33]

The idea that Minerva and Luigi's case is best interpreted as an example of an early modern diplomatic working couple is confirmed by several other documents in the Archivio

Lorenzi. Indeed, even the draft to Marie Louise Elisabeth of Parma discussed above, which may at first be taken as clear evidence of Minerva's concerning lack of epistolary and relational autonomy, should rather be interpreted as the result of a close collaboration between her and her husband. Not only did Minerva transcribe the letter and put her identity as a female letter writer at the embassy's (and the household's) disposal; evidence suggests that she also had a degree of control over its text: on line 5, a 'de' added above the line in Minerva's very own hand (see fig.2: 'pouvoir m'empecher de me metre a ses pieds') reveals that, before transcribing her husband's draft, Minerva must have read it and amended its grammar. Also revealing is the fact that, in the same letter, "Minerva" calls herself grateful for the favour that the Duchess of Parma deigned to bestow on the prayers of her husband, which, she says, have been fuelled by hers ('je suis trop penetrée de la grace que Mad. a daigné accorder aux prieres de mon Mari *excites par les miennes*').[34]

Luigi's and Minerva's passive correspondences reflect the joint nature of their activity. Most of the letters addressed to Lorenzi, including many "official" ones, contain a mention of his wife, normally in the form of a flattering salutation, positioned, according to eighteenth-century letter-writing etiquette, either at the beginning or at the very end of the letter. By way of example, a letter from the French historian Jean-Baptiste de la Curne de Sainte-Palaye and his twin brother, dated 28 December 1755, ends with the following salutation: 'My brother and I, we join in wishing to you and your wife alike all the success of which you are both worthy' ('Nous nous unissons mon frere et moi pour vous souhaiter et a Madame votre femme touttes les prosperités dont vous etes dignes l'un et l'autre').[35] In another letter of 2 July 1757, this time from Pierre-Joseph Fiquet du Boccage, husband of the above-mentioned Anne-Marie du Boccage, we read: 'Madame Du Boccage joins me in paying her respects to countess Lorenzi, and begs you to be so kind as to ask her to tell all the ladies whom she was

so kind as to introduce to us, that she much regrets – as I do, too – that she could not benefit for longer of their attentions, which we shall never forget' ('Made Du Boccage se joint a moi pour assurer de nos respects made La Comtesse de Laurenci et la supplie de vouloir bien lui rendre le service de Dire aux dames quelle lui a fait la Grace de lui faire connoitre combien Elle regrette et moi aussi de navoir pas joui plus longtems de leurs bontés, dont nous garderons un souvenir eternel').[36]

Symmetrically, most of the letters addressed to Minerva contain references to her husband. Indeed, many of them were included in larger parcels bearing the name of the ambassador on the envelope or were otherwise attached to letters addressed to Luigi. Perhaps more interestingly still, some of the letters preserved in the Archivio Lorenzi are jointly addressed to the ambassador and his wife. A noteworthy example is offered by Orlando, who, on 19 June 1752, sent two distinct letters to his brother and sister-in-law to inform them of his recent promotion to the degree of colonel; the two letters, however, were written on a same sheet of paper, so that it was virtually impossible for the two spouses not to read what had been written to the other.[37] Addressing one's letters to a couple, after all, was a rather common practice in the eighteenth century – suffice it to think of Voltaire's extensive correspondence with Jeanne Grâce Bosc de Bouchet and Charles-Augustin Feriol, comte d'Argental, French ambassador to Parma and Piacenza; or of Marie Jeanne Riccoboni's letters to David and Eva Garrick.[38]

Minerva's Participation in the Life of the Embassy

The above hypothesis that Minerva actually played a major role within the embassy can be further supported.

To begin with, the two letters quoted above from Du Boccage and Sainte-Palaye as well as many other letters in the Archivio Lorenzi suggest that Minerva worked in close collaboration with her husband to ensure that French artists and aristocrats on the Grand Tour received first class hospitality during their stay in Tuscany. Minerva and Luigi would often organise sumptuous banquets both for these artists and aristocrats and for the local nobility, and these events may have offered both her and her husband an irreplaceable opportunity to gather and exchange information. These gatherings would take place either at Minerva's family country house in Montughi or at the more central Palazzo Franceschi, which the couple bought in the 1740s.[39] Most importantly, they would sometimes take place in Luigi's absence; this is evidenced, for instance, in a letter of 6 July 1759 (see fig.1 above), in which Minerva informs her husband that she had dined with various noblewomen and members of the local Senato dei Quarantotto.

But there is another episode that appears particularly telling. While, as already hinted at above, neither Minerva nor her husband appear to have travelled much, documents in the Archivio Lorenzi show that, in the summer of 1761, Minerva and her father travelled to Venice for a journey that was apparently primarily for leisure. As evidenced in a letter of 31 July 1761, during her stay on the lagoon, Minerva lunched at the French embassy, where she met her Venetian counterpart, and also received two visits from François de Baschi, the then French ambassador to the Serenissima:

> I lunched at the Ambassador's yesterday, for he had asked me to do so the day before, when I went to visit his wife; she is a good lady, although not overly well-mannered; but she told me she wished to stop by and pay me a visit, and I begged her not to inconvenience herself, and, for now, she has not come yet. The ambassador, however, did come twice; he is a fine gentleman and was very polite; Husband and wife both enquired about you and asked why

> is it that you have not yet come to see this Country and if you had ever been here. I think You should write something to them about all the attentions that they have paid me.
>
> (Ieri fui ha pranzo dall'Ambasciatore il quale mi pregò il giorno antecedente essendo io stata a dar visita alla sua moglie la quale è una Buona Dama senza p[er]ò essere eccedentemente garbata Ella però mi ha detto di volere passare di qui per farmi visita, del che io l'ho pregata di non s'incomodare, e per ora non vi è ancora venuta; L'ambasciatore p[er]ò vi è stato due volte, ed egli è un buon signore e mi ha fatto molte politezze; mi hanno domandato di lei Marito e moglie e mi hanno detto per che lei non veniva ha vedere questo Paese e se vi era stata. Crederei che Lei farebbe bene di scrivergli qualche cosa rispetto alle attenzioni che mi hanno fatto).[40]

Minerva, in short, is here advising her husband as to what to write in his future missives to the French ambassador to Venice, and while in this letter she may not be reporting any political or diplomatic news of importance, one may very well imagine that these topics were indeed discussed at her three meetings with François de Baschi, and that Luigi was fully informed of their conversation upon her return to Tuscany.

Conclusion

The documents preserved in the Archivio Lorenzi are in many ways exceptional. For one thing, they offer an almost unparalleled opportunity to look directly at an early modern ambassadress, removing, so to speak, that 'husband filter' with which many scholars are compelled to come to terms. For another, they allow us to examine the everyday activity of a diplomatic working couple to a degree of detail never attained before. To read "Minerva's"

drafts is to see the diplomatic couple at their desk; it is to understand the way in which diplomatic *Arbeitspaare* concretely functioned.

But there is more. Indeed, Minerva's case asks for a radical reinterpretation of the interplay between gender and diplomacy in the early modern period. A conclusion that one cannot help but drawing from the case discussed in this paper is that, in the absence of drafts or other pieces of evidence that attest to the contrary, there will always be room to conjecture that an ambassadress may not have been the (sole) author of her letters. Likewise, if we accept the notion that, in early modern Europe, it was not unusual for married ambassadors to work side by side with their wives, we cannot help but suppose that ambassadresses may have been involved in the composition of their husbands' letters. Much more than today, in the early modern period, letter-writing (and letter-reading) were collaborative, even social practices, and in the self-contained space of the embassy perhaps more than anywhere else, individual authorship was virtually inexistent.[41] If nothing else, one should bear in mind that it was common practice for ambassadors, as it was for all aristocrats and even for the uneducated, to dictate one's letters.[42] What this paper hopes to have shown, therefore, is that drawing categorical lines between men's and women's (diplomatic) letters is simply impossible.[43] Of course, early modern men and women had a sense (more or less similar to our contemporary one: that is debatable) of what constituted a man's rather than a woman's style, and it is possible to distinguish tropes or formulae that were more prominent in female rather than male letter writers, and vice versa. Yet, to treat women's and men's correspondences as two completely distinct sets would be artificial and simplistic. Similarly simplistic, as already suggested by James Daybell, are scholars' attempts at distinguishing between male and female (diplomatic) networks.[44] There indeed were male- and female-dominated (correspondence) networks, and for a male diplomat, marriage provided access to

an additional web of possible interlocutors, informers, and protectors.[45] Going back to our case study, the fact itself that Luigi thought it appropriate to have his wife send letters to the Duchess of Parma and other influential political figures reveals that he was perfectly aware of the role that women's letters could play in at least backing up requests advanced by male diplomats, and of the importance of female diplomatic channels more generally. Even so, it seems impossible categorically to distinguish between male and female (correspondence) networks. After all, as shown by the most recent scholarship, gender did not play as important a role in the early modern period as it did, for instance, in the 19th century. In the early modern period, considerations of status and rank still prevailed over considerations of gender.[46]

Finally, one more conclusion can be drawn from the case study presented here. Luigi's drafting of some of his wife's letters (or his involvement in their composition) prompts us to think about the links between literature and diplomatic writing.[47] Epistolary novels purportedly authored by women were quite common in the eighteenth century – one need only think of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* or, perhaps more aptly in this context, of the *Lettres portugaises* (1669), a collection of 5 letters allegedly authored by a Portuguese nun, but in fact written by the abovementioned Gabriel-Joseph de Guilleragues, French ambassador to the Sublime Porte.[48] As already hinted at above, Luigi Lorenzi was a voracious reader and was in touch, either directly or indirectly, with many of the most distinguished writers of the time. Among his papers, one finds a manuscript copy of Rousseau's *Pygmalion* as well as various short verses by Voltaire, and he is known to have authored several learned essays and academic lectures, including one on Roman scales and one on Castel de Saint-Pierre's *Projet pour render la paix perpétuelle en Europe*.[49] While arguably not immediately preoccupied with literary concerns, when drafting his wife's letters

(or rather, when working with her to compose them), Luigi (and Minerva) must have reflected on the characteristics of women's and men's letters; he/they must have emphasised the elements that he/they saw as specific to women's letters; in short, he/they must have adopted the position of an epistolary novelist attempting to create the persona of a female letter writer. After all, staging and mimicking voices and styles were essential skills to all early modern diplomats, who were appointed to represent their monarch and act and speak on their behalf. Diplomacy, as Timothy Hampton points out, 'is a political practice that is also a writing practice'.[50]

---

[1] The research for this article was made possible by a Clara Florio Cooper Bursary and a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship. Early versions of this article were presented at the 'Diplomacy and Gender in the Early Modern World' conference (Oxford, 11-12 June 2018) and at the 'Negotiation, Peace, and Peace-Making' colloquium (Oxford, 2-4 May 2019). I am extremely grateful to the attendees of both events for their feedback, as well as to Tracey Sowerby (University of Oxford), who organised the latter symposium. I would also like to express my most sincere thanks to Renato Pasta (University of Florence), who first introduced me to the Archivio Lorenzi, to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, as well as to Florian Kühnel (University of Göttingen) and Kelsey Rubin-Detlev (University of Southern California) who both read an early draft of this essay.

[2] A partial exception to this rule is offered by Friedrich Carl von Moser's *L'Ambassadrice et ses droits* (Berlin: chez Etienne de Bourdeaux, 1754). As Lucien Bély points out in his essay in this special issue, in fact, Moser is rather ambiguous in his use of the term 'ambassadrice', and while he normally employs it to refer to the wife of an ambassador, he also uses it to indicate a female ambassador in her own right. See Moser, *L'Ambassadrice et ses droits*, 12: '[Les femmes] ne deviennent, à proprement parler, Ambassadrices, que lorsqu'elles mêmes sont revêtües du caractère par lequel elles représentent le Souverain' ('Properly speaking, women do not become 'ambassadresses' unless they are invested with the authority of representing their souverain'). The original spelling of quotations has been retained. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. Here and in the rest of this article, when quoting Moser's treatise, I use the French translation as more easily accessible and more widely-read than the German original.

[3] The letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who was famously in Istanbul as the wife of Edward Wortley Montagu, British ambassador to the Sublime Port from 1716 to 1718, can be read in Robert Halsband (ed.), *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965-67, 3 vols). For an analysis of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as ambassadress see Florian Kühnel, '"Minister-like Cleverness, Understanding, and Influence on Affairs": Ambassadresses in Everyday Business and Courtly Ceremonies at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century', in Tracey A. Sowerby and Jan Hennings (eds), *Practices of Diplomacy in the Early Modern World, c. 1410-1800* (London & New York: Routledge, 2017), 130-146. Ambassadresses' letters are at the core of some of the articles in this special issue, among others those of Kristine Dyrmann and Jean-Charles Speeckaert. An important study on letter writing, women, and diplomacy is James Daybell, 'Gender, Politics and Diplomacy: Women, News and Intelligence Networks in Elizabethan England', in Robyn Adams and Rosanna Cox (eds), *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 101-119. An example of an article that looks at diaries to study the diplomatic activity of an early modern ambassadress (Maria Sophia von Dietrichstein, Countess von Pötting) is Laura Oliván Santaliestra, 'Gender, Work and Diplomacy in Baroque Spain: The Ambassadorial Couples of the Holy Roman Empire as *Arbeitspaare'*, *Gender & History*, xxix (2017), 423-445.

[4] Through his diplomatic activity, Lorenzi served a wide variety of interests. For more on this topic see Ruggero Sciuto, '*Cui prodest?* Pour une Révision du concept de *diplomatie culturelle*', in Virginie Martin and Gilles

Montègre (eds), *Négocier l'étranger. Une diplomatie de l'Europe moderne*, Rome: Ecole Française de Rome (forthcoming in 2022).

[5] On Luigi Lorenzi see Renato Pasta, 'Ancora su Voltaire e l'Italia: Lettere Inedite a Luigi Lorenzi (1746-1764)', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, clxx (2012) 731-756; and Ruggero Sciuto, 'The Correspondence of André Morellet: Seven Unpublished Letters to Luigi Lorenzi (1758-1765)', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, clxxiv (2016), 499-52.

[6] Sciuto, 'The Correspondence of André Morellet', p.503.

[7] The letters exchanged between Lorenzi and Voltaire can be read in Pasta, 'Ancora su Voltaire e l'Italia'. A study of the Lorenzi-La Condamine correspondence can be found in Ruggero Sciuto, 'Reti Diplomatiche al Servizio del Progresso Scientifico: Luigi Lorenzi e l'Inoculazione Antivaiolosa nella Toscana Granducale', *Chroniques italiennes*, xxxvii (2019), 283-301. For more information on the Lorenzi-Trublet correspondence see Ruggero Sciuto, 'Démarches secrètes de l'abbé Trublet pour devenir Immortel', *La Lettre clandestine*, xxviii (2020), 241-253.

[8] See Sciuto, 'The Correspondence of André Morellet', 502.

[9] Anne Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680-1750* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995); Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); and Laurence Brockliss, *Calvet's Web: Enlightenment and the Republic of Letters in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[10] See Archivio Lorenzi, folder 68. Documents in the Archivio Lorenzi are regrettably unnumbered.

[11] See Archivio Lorenzi, folder 68.

[12] Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 92. On the importance of familial letters in the context of early modern diplomacy see also Mark Netzloff, 'The Ambassador's Household: Sir Henry Wotton, Domesticity, and Diplomatic Writing', in Adams and Cox (eds), *Diplomacy and Early Modern Culture*, 155-171.

[13] Regrettably, little is known about the Duchess of Calabritto. She was the daughter of Leopold Marc de Ligneville, marquis d'Houécourt and the wife of Francesco Tuttavilla, Duke of Calabritto. See Eloisa Dodero, *Ancient Marbles in Naples in the Eighteenth Century: Findings, Collections, Dispersals* (Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2019), 171-172. Johann Joachim Winckelmann saw her collection of ancient gems in Naples and describes it in his *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*. Dodero also reports that, in 1764, the Duchess of Calabritto applied for the position of *dama di corte*.

[14] On the material aspects of early modern (diplomatic) letters see, for example, Jonathan Gibson, 'Significant Space in Manuscript Letters', *The Seventeenth Century*, xii/1 (1997), 1-10; Giora Sternberg, 'Epistolary Ceremonial: Corresponding Status at the Time of Louis XIV', *Past and Present*, cciv (2009), 33-88; Heather Wolfe, '«Neatly Sealed, with Silk, and Spanish Wax or Otherwise»: The Practice of Letter Locking with Silk Floss in Early Modern England', in Steven W. Beal and Susan P. Cerasano (eds), *'In the Prayse of Writing': Early Modern Manuscript Studies* (London: British Library Publishing, 2012), 169-189; Tracey A. Sowerby, 'Negotiating with the Material Text. Royal Correspondence Between England and the Wider Word', in Tracey A. Sowerby and Joanna Craigwood, *Cultures of Diplomacy and Literary Writing in the Early Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 203-217; and Kelsey Rubin-Detlev, *The Epistolary Art of Catherine the Great* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019).

[15] On Luigi Lorenzi and the Morellet brothers see Sciuto, 'The Correspondence of André Morellet'.

[16] Archivio Lorenzi, folder 71.

[17] Archivio Lorenzi, folder 65.

[18] Dena Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[19] Goodman, *Becoming a Woman in the Age of Letters*, 2-3.

[20] Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, 'Introduction: Autonomy Refigured', in Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (eds.), *Relational Autonomy: Feminist perspectives on autonomy, agency, and the social self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). See, in particular, p. 4, where the authors draw attention to the links between 'relational autonomy' and the growth of the political self: 'The term 'relational autonomy', as we understand it, does not refer to a single unified conception of autonomy but is rather an umbrella term, designating a range of related perspectives. These perspectives are premised on a shared conviction, the conviction that persons are socially embedded and that agents' identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Thus, the focus of relational approaches is to analyse the implications of the intersubjective and social dimensions of selfhood and identity for conceptions of individual autonomy and moral and political agency'.

[21] Two books provide the background against which to situate Minerva's case: Rebecca Messbarger's *The Century of Women* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2016) offers an extremely interesting introduction to the condition (and representation) of women in eighteenth-century Italy, while a collection of essays edited by Paula Findlen, Wendy Wassyng Roworth, and Catherine M. Sama (*Italy's Eighteenth Century: Gender and Culture in the Age of the Grand Tour* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009)) looks at European Grand Tourists' perception of gender dynamics in Enlightenment Italy, focusing not just on women's autonomy, but also on cicisbeismo and castrati.
[22] See above Florian Kühnel, 'The Ambassador is Dead – Long Live the Ambassadress: Gender, Rank and Proxy Representation in Early Modern Diplomacy'.
[23] See below Jean-Charles Speeckaert, '«The Soul of my Office»: Lady Torrington and the British embassy in Brussels during the Belgian Revolution of 1789'. A similar case is offered by doña Francisca de Zúñiga, wife of the Marquis de Mirabel, Spanish ambassador to Paris in the 1620s. See Laura Oliván Santaliestra, 'Gender, Work and Diplomacy in Baroque Spain', 424, and Alain Hugon, *Au Service du Roi Catholique, 'honorables ambassadeurs' et 'divins espions': representation diplomatique et service secret dans les relations hispano-françaises de 1598 à 1635* (Madrid: Casa Velázquez, 2004), 162.
[24] Sciuto, 'The Correspondence of André Morellet', 503.
[25] See Pasta, 'Ancora su Voltaire e l'Italia', 742-745.
[26] Archivio Lorenzi, folder 67.
[27] Nothing is known, regrettably, about Minerva's early years and education. Having born to a distinguished family, however, it is safe to assume that she received at least some rudimental instruction in the French language as well as in letter writing. For more on the eighteenth-century Italian debate concerning women's education see Messbarger, *The Century of Women*, ch.III.
[28] That is, of course, if one does not take into account the possible scenario in which Minerva's drafts in Italian are in fact transcriptions of now lost drafts by Luigi.
[29] Archivio Lorenzi, folder 73.
[30] The Albergotti of this letter is arguably to be identified with the marquis Albergotto Albergotti
[31] Moser, *L'Ambassadrice et ses droits*, 165.
[32] Laura Oliván Santaliestra, 'Gender, Work and Diplomacy in Baroque Spain'.
[33] In 2008, a special issue of *Continuity and Change* was entirely devoted to the broader topic of early modern working couples. See Danielle van den Heuvel and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk (eds.), *Partners in Business? Spousal Cooperation in Trades in Early Modern England and the Dutch Republic*, *Continuity and Change*, xxiii (2008).
[34] Archivio Lorenzi, folder 66 (fig. 1). Likewise, whenever Orlando was sent to lobby the French ministers in Versailles to grant his brother Luigi a pay raise, he would do so, as he repeatedly writes, 'on behalf of both you and your wife' ('de votre part et de Mad.e votre Epouse').
[35] Archivio Lorenzi, folder 59.
[36] Archivio Lorenzi, folder 64.
[37] Archivio Lorenzi, folder 67.
[38] Voltaire's letters to the D'Argentals can be read in Voltaire, *Correspondence and Related Documents*, ed. by Theodore Besterman, in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1968-), vol.85-135. For Marie Jeanne Riccoboni's letters to the Garricks see, instead, James C. Nicholls (ed.), *Mme Riccoboni's Letters to David Hume, David Garrick, and sir Robert Liston, 1764-1783* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1976).
[39] On the importance of banqueting and feasting in a diplomatic context see, for example, Kühnel, '"Minister-like cleverness"', 138. In a paper delivered at the 'Diplomacia de las movilidades culturales: Normas, practices y protagonistas (siglos XVII-XIX)' conference (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 21-22 November 2019), Charlotte Bellamy similarly focussed on cooks in eighteenth-century Sweden to understand their diplomatic importance. For more on Palazzo Franceschi see Pasta, 'Ancora su Voltaire e l'Italia', 732.
[40] Archivio Lorenzi, folder 75.
[41] See, for instance, Roger Chartier, 'Loisir et sociabilité : lire à haute voix dans l'Europe moderne', *Littératures classiques*, xii (1990), 127-147.
[42] For more on this topic see Netzloff, 'The Ambassador's Household'.
[43] On the traits that were regarded as specific to women's letters see, for example, Suzan Van Dijk, 'Les Topoï « Féminins » dans des Fictions Epistolaires et des Correspondances Véritables : Mesdames de Graffigny, Riccoboni et Charrière', in Brigitte Diaz and Jürgen Siess (eds.), *L'épistolaire au féminin. Correspondances de femmes (XVIII^{e}-XXe siècle)* (Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, 2006), 39-50.
[44] See Daybell, 'Gender, Politics and Diplomacy', 102

[45] As recent scholarship has shown, having a wife (and travelling with her) gave early modern ambassadors access to otherwise closed spaces of sociability and decision-making. This is obviously true of the Ottoman court, but also of many Western European kingdoms: in a paper delivered on 26 November 2019 at the TORCH Network on Diplomacy in the Early Modern Period, for instance, Marc Jaffré showed that, at the court of Louis XIII of France, ambassadresses could informally attend ceremonies and festivities which their husbands were compelled to avoid. The decline in the number of clerical ambassadors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has also been linked to their incapacity to access female political networks.

[46] For a broader discussion of the importance of the category of gender in the early modern period see Matthias Pohlig's essay in this special issue.

[47] For more on diplomatic writing see Filippo De Vivo, 'How to Read Venetian Relazioni', *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, xxxiv (2011), 25-59; and Donald E. Queller, 'The Development of Ambassadorial Relazioni', in John R. Hale (ed.), *Renaissance Venice* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), 174-196. On the links between diplomatic writing and literature see Sowerby and Craigwood, *Cultures of Diplomacy and Literary Writing in the Early Modern World*, and Timothy Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy: Literature and Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

[48] [Gabriel-Joseph de Lavergne, comte de Guilleragues], *Lettres portugaises* (Paris: Barbin, 1669).

[49] Archivio Lorenzi, folder 97. Lorenzi's 'Dissertazione sopra le bilance degli antichi' can be read in *Saggi di dissertazioni accademiche pubblicamente lette nella nobile Accademia Etrusca dell'antichissima Città di Cortona* (Rome: Pagliarini, 1735), 93-102. For an analysis of Lorenzi's 'Discorso per dimostrare la possibilità di stabilire la pace perpetua in Europa' (Archivio Lorenzi, folder 97) and its political implications see Sciuto, 'Cui prodest?'.

[50] Hampton, *Fictions of Embassy*, 7.