

Giacomo Giudici / Birkbeck, University of London
Contact email: ggiudi01@mail.bbk.ac.uk

Paper proposal for 'The Politics of Paper in the Early Modern World'
(Groeningen, 9–10 June 2016)

**Deploying Paper as a Performance of Power:
The Strategies of Francesco II Sforza (1522–1535)
as a Case Study to Rethink Early Modern Political-administrative Correspondence**

Francesco II Sforza (1522–1535) was the last of the Sforza dynasty (1450–1535) to rule the duchy of Milan. Francesco II's history as duke was always characterised by grave political and financial instability: for example, he struggled to fund his diplomatic agents, and to display the *magnificentia* expected from a Renaissance prince.

However, as I will demonstrate, there was one expense Francesco II did *not* cut: that for corresponding with officers and subjects around the territory of the duchy of Milan. At first glance, the reason of this choice seems obvious: pragmatically, Francesco II needed to continuously send messages and orders in order to administer his dominion.

But was that it? I do not think so. By looking at the highly rhetorical (and often unrealistic) 'language of governance' of Sforza letters, and at evidence suggesting that Francesco II did not expect his own orders to be actually executed, I will argue that correspondence was not primarily a conveyor of information. Instead, inundating the duchy of Milan with Sforza paper was a self-standing strategy of governance, crucial because it allowed Francesco II to materially set down a basic layer of authority.

In this sense, paper was a tool of governance *in itself*, because it was the performance of its deployment that signified power. Historians normally overlook this aspect of political-administrative correspondence, but I will argue that it was fundamental — especially considering the relatively low ambitions of early modern statecraft.

Theme: Paper as a tool governance, diplomacy, and political information management.