

Chapter 3

Transformation: From Naples to Ferrara

On 24 May 1473, Eleonora d'Aragona, accompanied by a vast entourage of Neapolitan and Ferrarese nobles, left Naples to begin the long overland journey to Ferrara.

Travelling across half of the Italian peninsula, via the Papal States, Siena, Florence and Faenza, they would reach Ferrara on 3 July 1473 having been on the road for six weeks.

The journey took on the character of a state visit as Eleonora stopped along the way at towns where she and her inner circle were met by local dignitaries and accommodated at the expense of the town's leading citizens. The most significant of these visits was to Rome where Eleonora's *comitiva* remained for five days, entertained at vast expense by the young cardinal, Pietro Riario, on behalf of his uncle, Pope Sixtus IV.

The political significance of Eleonora's nuptial journey, particularly her visit to Rome, has been greatly illuminated by the discovery of two documents in the *Archivio di Stato* in Modena. These documents are edited and translated for the first time in the Appendix as Documents 3 and 4. Both are sets of instructions, composed for Eleonora's guidance along the way, one by Ferrante, while the other can be safely attributed to Diomedes Carafa. While the primary concern of both men was to ensure that Eleonora appeared in the best possible light in her meetings with civic and religious leaders along the way, particularly in her audience with Sixtus IV, the tone of their instructions reflects their differing priorities: Ferrante's were power and influence, Carafa's were style and protocol. These documents will be analysed in this chapter in light of their different emphases.

How Eleonora implemented these instructions will be seen through words of two contemporary letters, one that the young princess herself wrote to Diomedes Carafa to share her experiences with him, and through him her father, and the other that his courtier, Teofilo Calcagnini, wrote to Ercole to inform him of his bride's progress. Both these letters contain detailed descriptions of Eleonora's splendidly-arrayed party as they rode through the streets of Rome, their destination the magnificent palace of Cardinal Riario, where Eleonora and her ladies were accommodated in great luxury, or to St Peter's, where Sixtus IV celebrated the Mass of Pentecost and warmly welcomed the young royal visitor. The extraordinary banquet staged in Eleonora's honour by Pietro Riario, in front of his palace in the Piazza Santissimi Apostoli, will be seen for the first time through Calcagnini's eyes in an account that has only recently come to light in Padua. This letter is edited in full in the Appendix as Document 5. Calcagnini's flamboyant descriptions of Eleonora and Pietro Riario, the two stars of the Roman *spettacoli*, are a joy to read. Eleonora's triumphal entry into Ferrara and her marriage to Ercole d'Este the following day will be seen through the eyes of chroniclers who stood among the crowd that had gathered to observe Eleonora's transformation from Neapolitan princess to Estense duchess. At the close of this chapter, letters written by her father and brother soon after her marriage suggest that their affection for her was undiminished by the miles which separated them.

The Journey Begins

The sheer size and complexity of the vast caravan of men and beasts, charged with the task of conveying Ercole's royal bride from Naples to Ferrara, are evoked by Falletti:

Questa grande macchina trionfale che la porta da Napoli a Ferrara [...] la corte itinerante di Eleonora, una immensa brigata di nobili e damigelle, cuochi, musici, servi, palafrenieri, oratori, giureconsulti, spenditori, barbieri, garzoni, pifferi, trombetti, secalchi, segretari,

credenzieri, sarti, medici, maestri di stalla, famigli, cavalli, muli, carriaggi [This great triumphal machine that takes her from Naples to Ferrara [...] Eleonora's travelling court, an immense company of nobles and ladies-in-waiting, cooks, musicians, servants, grooms, orators, jurists, purchasers of provisions, barbers, stable hands, pipers, trumpeters, seneschals, secretaries, stewards, tailors, doctors, stable masters, personal staff, horses, mules, carts].¹

The enormity of the enterprise suggests that the six months which had weighed so heavily on Ercole and Eleonora had been occupied with feverish preparations in both Ferrara and Naples. For Ferrante, his daughter's stately progress through the principalities, republics and fiefdoms of the Italian peninsula and her visits to their cities were a vast public relations exercise. For those who witnessed her progress through towns and countryside, the young princess was the embodiment of the power, influence and wealth of the Kingdom of Naples. Ferrante's decision to postpone the journey until the long days of summer ensured that the crowds would come out to marvel at his daughter as she passed.

Carafa's Instructions for Eleonora

The political agenda underlying Eleonora's journey to Ferrara is nowhere more apparent than in two sets of instructions which have remained unnoticed among Estense diplomatic documents in the Archivio di Stato in Modena. Both these documents are essentially procedural manuals, intended for Eleonora's personal use during the journey, containing advice on what she should say and how she should behave when she had occasion to meet civic and religious leaders in the various centres of population along her route. That is where the similarity between them ends. They are clearly by two different authors, one easily identifiable by the signature at its base as Ferrante, while the other I have attributed to Diomedes Carafa, on the basis of its hand and of the

¹ Falletti, 271.

elliptical syntax that it shares with his other *memoriali* and his autograph letters. A close reading of both these documents reveals that they are also vastly different in both content and purpose. While Ferrante's clear intention is that Eleonora should extract the greatest possible political value for Naples from her meetings with men of influence along her route, particularly Sixtus IV, Carafa's advice is aimed at helping the young princess to navigate the minefields of protocol and etiquette which she will encounter in her meetings with those leaders. As such, Carafa's instructions are in effect a primer of good manners.

Although Carafa's instructions bear no date or signature, as they appear to be lacking their final page, their title, "Lo che averà da fare la madama Elieonora per lo camino" [What Madama Eleonora will have to do during the journey], indicates that it was written for Eleonora just before she departed from Naples in late May 1473.² Although there is no indication of the document's authorship, the handwriting and literary style are identical to those of Carafa's autograph letters to both Ercole and Eleonora, while both its contents and expressed purpose resemble those expressed by Carafa in the *memoriali* or instructions which he dedicated to each of Ferrante's children as they were about to embark on similar journeys.³ That Diomede Carafa should seek to guide Eleonora in her first diplomatic encounters should not be

² ASMo, Cancelleria, Ramo ducale, Documenti spettanti ai principi estensi, principi non regnanti, busta 19, "Lo che averà da fare la madama Elieonora per lo camino" [What the Lady Eleonora is to do along the way], attributed to Diomede Carafa [May 1473], hereafter referred to as Carafa, *Instructions*. Appendix, Document 3.

³ Moores suggests that the terms *Memoriali* and *Istruzioni* were used interchangeably in contemporary documents; see Moores, "Diomede Carafa," 59 and n. 1. Carafa composed *memoriali* for all of Ferrante's children; see Carafa, "[Memoriale] scritto ad Alfonso d' Aragona duca di Calabria primogenito del Re Ferdinando per lo viaggio della Marca d' Ancona"; idem, "Memoriale a la Serenissima Regina de Ungaria"; idem, "Memoriale scritto a Francesco d' Aragona figliuolo de re Ferdinando, il quale stave sotto la disciplina del re mattia d' Ungheria"; idem, "Memoriale facto et ordinato allo Illustrissimo Signore Don Federico per l' andata fece in Franza"; idem, "Memoriale a lo Reverendissimo Monsegnore Cardinale de Aragonia del camino have da fare in Ungaria et cetera," in his *Memoriali*, 43–67, 213–43, 295–315, 316–32, and 377–83. Lupis's "Note linguistiche" and "Glossario," *Memoriali*, 387–408 and 410–22, have been particularly useful in interpreting the present document..

surprising, given his long practical experience of diplomacy as Ferrante's spokesman, and his avowed intention to continue to love and serve Eleonora even from afar.

Carafa's first note of advice for Eleonora concerns how she should fittingly pay her respects to her father before she leaves Naples. While he insists that she should show due filial deference to the king, kneeling before him to ask his pardon for anything she has done to displease him and to seek his blessing, Carafa then alludes to Ferrante's affection for her, suggesting that she ask him "se voglia racordare de essa e scriverli e fare dimostracione che one uno conosca e massime vostro marito che Sa Maestà ve ame" [that he should want you to remember him and to write to him and to make it clear that everyone knows, and especially your husband, that His Majesty loves you]. There is an underlying sense here that, should Ercole not treat Eleonora well in Ferrara, he will have to answer to her father.

Eleonora is then to take her leave of the people who have been an intimate part of her life until now and whom she will be leaving, possibly forever. She is first to ask her younger sister, Beatrice, to see to those gentlemen and ladies, in particular Madonna Maria, who have served her well, but who will be remaining behind in Naples. She is to speak with the governor of Castelnuovo, Messer Pasquale, and his wife, Lucente da Chiaromonte, asking them to look after the king and Beatrice, and to always commend Eleonora to her father.⁴ She should also ask her sister-in-law, Ippolita Maria, duchess of Calabria, to continually recommend her to the king.

⁴ Lucente da Chiaromonte and Pasquale Diaz Garlon or Diascarlon, count of Alife, were husband and wife. Pasquale was one of the young Catalans who followed Alfonso d'Aragona to Naples in 1432. He became one of the most important members of the court in Naples, serving both Alfonso and Ferrante in a variety of offices and receiving a number of extraordinary privileges from them. He is only ever referred to as misser Paschale, a sign of his closeness to the royal household. He was *castellano* [governor] of the principal royal residence in Naples, the Castel Nuovo; see Volpicella, *Instructionum Liber*, 328–9. Misser Pasquale is often mentioned in the royal family's letters, for example in Eleonora's letter to Diomedes Carafa from Rome on 10 June 1473; see Costantino Corvisieri, "Il trionfo romano di Eleanora d'Aragona nel giugno del 1473," *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 1 (1878): 475–91, and 10 (1887): 629–87 (654).

When she arrives at the towns of Aversa, Capua, Gaeta and Fundi, all within her father's kingdom, she is to thank the civic leaders for honouring her with their presence and for welcoming her. Then she is to thank her brothers, Alfonso, Federico and Giovanni, for accompanying her for a part of the way, and to ask them and all the other nobles present to commend her often to her father when they return to Naples.

The visit to Rome and Eleonora's meetings with Sixtus IV and his influential nephews are of special concern to Carafa, in keeping with the burgeoning friendship between Ferrante and Sixtus, with its potential for generous political and fiscal benefits for Ferrante and his kingdom.⁵ Carafa writes that, when she crosses into Papal territory near Terracina (Map 4), Eleonora can expect to be met by Sixtus's nephew, Leonardo della Rovere, who will accompany her to Rome.⁶ As they travel together towards Rome, Eleonora is to make "multe carize" [many shows of affection] towards him and to intimate to him her desire for an audience with Sixtus. Then, on reaching Rome, she is to assure those cardinals who come to visit her of Ferrante's goodwill towards them, taking special care to tell Sixtus's favourite nephew, Pietro Riario, cardinal of San Sisto, "quanto lo Signor Re lo ama" [how much the king loves him].⁷ Then, when she finds herself in Sixtus's presence, she is to assure the pontiff of her father's goodwill and love for him, and to thank His Holiness "de lo amore e affecione ve porta quale avite intiso

⁵ Pastor 4:214 and 245.

⁶ Terracina was on the border between the kingdom of Naples and the Papal States; see Pastor, 4:278. Leonardo della Rovere was created Prefect of Rome in 1472 and occupied that position until his death in 1475; see Gregorio Leti, *Il nipotismo di Roma or The History of the Popes Nephews from the Time of Sixtus IV Anno 1471 to the Death of the Late Pope Alexander VII Anno 1667* (London: printed for John Starkey, 1673), 45; Pastor, 4:245. He was Eleonora's brother-in-law, having been betrothed to Giovanna d' Aragona, Ferrante's natural daughter by his mistress, Diana Guardato; see Lorenzo Di Fonzo, *I pontefici Sisto IV (1471-1484) e Sisto V (1585-1590)* (Rome: Edizioni Miscellanea Francescana, 1987), 56-57.

⁷ Egmont Lee writes of Pietro Riario: "He was authorised to develop a brilliant court in Rome, which soon came to be used as a branch of the papal diplomatic machinery. ... [He] was allowed enormous expenditures in establishing what he himself referred to as a 'regia domus', a household which by its display of wealth dazzled even the citizens of Rome, to whom this kind of ostentation on the part of cardinals was no novelty"; see his *Sixtus IV and Men of Letters* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1978), 33.

da multi' [for the love and affection he bears you, of which you have been informed by many people]. She is also to thank Sixtus:

che la Santità Sua poi ve à presa per figlia che lo voglia continuare, che avite dui patre, la Maiestà del Re e la Santità Sua, e lo pregate ve done la Sua benedicione cossi como ad patre como como [sic] papa e lo rengraciarite assai de quanto ve devete [that His Holiness then has taken you as a daughter, which he should continue, so that you have two fathers, His Majesty the King and His Holiness, and ask him to give you his blessing, both as father and as Pope, and you will thank him greatly as much as you should].

Sixtus proved to most generous towards Eleonora, granting her three audiences, commissioning his cardinal nephews to organize in her honour a series of entertainments which rivalled each other in extravagance and display, and presenting her with “un fermaglio con secte ponte de dyamante, due camelli colli scavi et una acchanea lyarda” [a clasp with a seven-pointed diamond, two camels with their handlers and a dappled white palfrey].⁸

Carafa is quite specific about the protocol attached to Eleonora's acceptance of these and other gifts which she might receive along the way. She should treat all the givers equally and with affection, regardless of the value of the gift, to the extent that, “quanto minore è l'apresento le gracie siano più” [the less they give you, the greater should be the thanks]. She should not leave any gifts unopened, “quelli vogliate vedere sempre quando velle portano, che è uno scorno a chi apresenta <che> non veda <che> sia essere voluto vedere” [you should always look at the gifts when they bring them to you, because it is an affront to the giver if he does not see that you wanted to look at it].

Carafa also insists that the greater part of these gifts should be given to “quelli signori ve acompagnarano e massime ad misser Sismundo” [those gentleman who will be

⁸ For descriptions of the festivities organised for Eleonora in Rome, see Corvisieri, 1878 and 1887; Fabrizio Cruciani, *Teatro nel Rinascimento, Roma 1450–1550* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1983), 151–64; Falletti, “Le feste,”; Meg Licht, “Elysium: a Prelude to Renaissance Theater,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 49 (1996): 1–29; Pastor 4: 241–45. For *acchanea* or *chinea*, a ‘small, fast horse for riding’, see Giuseppe Trenti, *Voci di terre estensi: glossario del volgare d'uso commune (Ferrara–Modena) da documenti e cronache del tempo secoli XIV–XVI* (Vignola: Fondazione di Vignola, 2008), 156.

escorting you and the greatest part to Misser Sigismondo], and that “la menor parte sia quella <che> resta in casa nostra” [the lesser part should remain with our people]. These gifts would be of two distinct kinds: “cose non da manzare zoè argento o altre mobile” [things not to be eaten, that is silver and other goods], and items of food and drink.⁹ She should keep the non-edible gifts for Ercole to see, “<che> conosca <che> ve aiano facto honore” [so that he may know the honour they have paid to you].¹⁰

Carafa then turns to Eleonora’s visits to Siena and Florence, advising her on how to respond to her reception by their *Signorie*: “la confortarite de parte de la Maiestà del Re e le rengraciarite dello honore ve averanno facto che so certo sarà grande” [assure them of His Majesty the King’s esteem and thank them for the honour they will have accorded to you which I am certain will be great]. Carafa singles out for special attention Eleonora’s meeting with Lorenzo de’ Medici. She should assure him of the King’s esteem, “dicendoli quanto la Maiestà Sua lo ama e vele offerite avere con lui

⁹ Trexler describes the giving of consumables to visiting dignitaries: “Although all possible items, from horses and fine cloth to paintings, cameos, and strange animals, were presented to visitors at their quarters, the core diplomatic gift was food – various sweets, wines, and staple – set in a frame of rich and artistic bowls, cups, and jars of precious metal that were also kept by the visitors. The idea was that the visitor would use these vessels and food to eat together with his entourage; see Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York and London: Academic Press, 1980), 324. The Florentine herald, Francesco Filarete, recorded the gifts sent to the Emperor Friedrich III when he visited Florence in 1452: “Conobbe l’operatione dello affectionato amore della città fiorentina, perchè subito mandò la nostra excelsa Signoria copiosissimo dono come è di costume, in modo che quasi stupefatto al numero delle confectioni, la quantità del pollaggio, la copia grande del selvagiume, la molta carne ferma, e quanti vini e bianchi e vermigli, l’abondanza delle biade, in modo che non che aparesse provvedimento d’un solo popolo, ma d’ogni imperial principe o d’una numerosa regione” [he became acquainted with the way the city of Florence shows affection and love, because straightaway our excellent Signoria sent a most abundant gift, as is our custom, so that [His Majesty] was almost overwhelmed by the number of delicacies, the quantity of poultry, the enormous amount of fresh game, the great mass of seared meat, the number of both white and red wines, the abundance of grain, so that it did not seem to be provided by the citizens of only one city, but by several princes of the Empire and a number of regions]; see Francesco Filarete and Angelo Manfidi, *The Libro ceremoniale of the Florentine Republic*, ed. Richard C. Trexler (Geneva: Droz, 1978), 72.

¹⁰ It was apparently not unusual for gifts to be sold. Trexler writes: “This practice in no way proves either insincerity or a modern objectification of human relations. Gifts had meaning within a ritual of exchange, where their aesthetic and material value ideally induced sincerity and subjectivity, and thus facilitated diplomatic contacts. Governments spent such money and skill in order to convince the ruler of their love; [...] in the ritual of presenting the gift, the status of the city had been raised, and that was what counted”; see Trexler, *Public Life*, 325–26. Filarete records that, during her visit to Florence, Eleonora was presented with “uno bellissimo bacino col boccale di quelli della Signoria” [a most beautiful basin and jug, from the the ones belonging to the Signoria]; see Filarete, *Libro ceremoniale*, 89.

bona amicitia, pregandolo voglia lui far cossi colla Signoria Vostra” [telling him how much His Majesty loves him, and offer to be his good friend, asking him that he should do the same with Your Ladyship].¹¹

Carafa’s next concern is how Eleonora is to act towards the people who will be accompanying her to Ferrara, in particular Sigismondo d’Este, to whom she should defer at all times. During the journey, she should also take the opportunity to get to know the various members of the Ferrarese party, so that “ante siate a Ferrara non sia niuno de isse a chi no aiate parlato e mostratele domestechenza” [before you reach Ferrara, there is not one of them to whom you have not spoken and shown familiarity].¹² This advice, which Eleonora apparently took to heart, had huge implications for her later popularity in Ferrara. She is not only to make an effort to get to know the members of the Ferrarese party, but she must also ensure that the people travelling with her from Naples are comfortably accommodated and that they receive a share of the foodstuffs presented to her. She is to treat the staff, which Ercole has appointed to serve her, with affection and allow them to discover, “<che> la Signoria Vostra sia dove bisongnya animosa e dove bisongnya umana e benegnya como era la Signoria prima” [that Your Ladyship is courageous where necessary and where necessary humane and kind, as His Lordship was to them previously].

¹¹ Carafa had conducted an amicable correspondence with Lorenzo de’ Medici since 1471; see Moores, “Diomedes Carafa,” 98. This correspondence continued, with gaps, until 1487, the year of Carafa’s death. Moores’s PhD dissertation contains transcripts of all of Carafa’s letters to Lorenzo.

¹² Carafa will give similar advice to Eleonora’s sister, Beatrice, when she is about to depart from Naples in September 1476 on her journey to Hungary as the bride of King Matthias Corvinus: “Et per lo cammino volglyate prima informave de tucta quella conmixtiva ve mandarà lo signor Re vostro marito, che sonno, cussi li homini de reputatione, como li altri, aciòche possate, quando ad uno, quando ad un altro, chyamarli et parlarli, ché accascarà o in casa o per cammino, hora l’uno hora l’altro poterli parlare et mostrarli demestechenza; ché ad sì longo cammino se porrà ad tucti satisfare senza parere éssire troppo praticabile et servare la dignità reale” [During the journey, you should first acquaint yourself with the members of the party which the king, your husband, will send for you, those who are men of some standing and the others, so that you may summon one and another of them and speak with them, because there will be a chance, either at home or during the journey to speak to them and show them familiarity individually, so that on such a long journey it will be possible to satisfy everyone without appearing to be too familiar and to preserve the dignity of royalty]; see “Memoriale ala Serenissima Regina de Ungaria,” in Carafa, *Memoriali*, 221.

Carafa is also quite specific on the etiquette of letter-writing, especially on how she should acknowledge what was being done to make her journey more pleasant. She should write to Ercole to thank him for providing her with such a fine escort, and especially to tell him how happy she has been with the way Sigismondo, “lo quale lo amate quanto carnale fratello” [whom you love like a full brother], and all the other Ferrarese gentlemen have treated her. She should instruct her secretaries to write every day to Ercole “dele giornate facite e honor ve sarà fatto che èy cosa <che> lui estimarà assai e con poco affano se farrà” [about the days just passed and the honour which is being paid to you, which is something that he will value greatly and which can be done with little effort]. She should also see that letters are sent to Ferrante every day until she reaches Ferrara, thereafter writing to let him know every detail “dele nature delle feste como de onne acoglienza ve sarà facta e delo piacere e modo di vivere, che multo piacerà alla Maiestà del Re sentirlo e massime per vostre lictere” [of the nature of the celebrations, and of all the welcomes accorded to you, and of the pleasure, and of the lifestyle, which will give His Majesty the King great pleasure to hear, and especially through your letters].

In the final section of his instructions, Carafa is most specific about how Eleonora should act when she meets Ercole d’Este for the first time in Ferrara. A careful reading of this section reveals that he is not just suggesting that she follow the protocol determined by her own superior rank, but that she should respect the duke’s dignity and approach him as a dutiful wife. Although the meetings of distinguished personages were normally dictated by strictly-observed rules of protocol and precedence, stage-managed by heralds and masters of ceremonies, “since every statement made and gesture performed, the distance travelled to meet the visitor, the clothing worn, and the gifts presented were carefully read by participants and onlookers as messages of

power,” Carafa is quite specific about how Eleonora is to approach Ercole for their first meeting.¹³

If he is on horseback, she is to pass him on the left, before bending over his hand, and touching it, whereupon he should respond to this with a kiss.¹⁴ After receiving him courteously and greeting him on behalf of her father and her brothers, “volendove lui venire non consentate venga se non al banda ricta” [when he wants to come <alongside> you, you must only allow him come to your right side]. Eleonora’s superior rank would require her to be on Ercole’s right side, the hierarchically superior *dexter*, or proper right, the position normally reserved for men.¹⁵ What Carafa is advising Eleonora is that she should ignore her superior rank as a royal princess, and treat her new husband with the same consideration and respect that he has also advised her to show towards Ercole’s brothers and other members of the Ferrarese party. These are similar sentiments to those expressed by Carafa in a brief *memoriale* titled “Quello have da fare la mulglyere per stare ad bene con suo marito et in che modo se have a honestare” [What the wife must do to get on well with her husband and how she should behave

¹³ Edward Muir, “Representations of Power,” in *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance: 1300–1550*, ed. John Najemy (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 241.

¹⁴ Touching the hand (*toccare la mano*) was “the standard greeting between persons who were not intimate, conveying respect and acceptance. Embraces or kisses were reserved for persons with a more intimate relationship – or for those with whom one wished to visibly establish a closer bond”; see Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court*, 171.

¹⁵ Eleonora’s superior status does dictate her position on the medallion struck to commemorate the marriage in Ferrara (Fig. 3). She appears on the left side of the medal, facing right, the position normally reserved for the man. Woods-Marsden writes: “With few exceptions, the likenesses portray the profiled lady facing left. In pendant portraits, such an orientation located the lady to the right of the pair – the position known as the heraldic sinister because it was on God’s left hand. The husband would thus be fittingly placed on the hierarchically superior heraldic dexter – or God’s right hand”; see Joanna Woods-Marsden, “Portrait of the Lady, 1430–1520,” in *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo’s Ginevra de’ Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women*, catalogue of an exhibition held at the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., 30 September 2001–6 January 2002 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 69. Woodall elaborates on the relative placement of men and women in double portraits in the Renaissance; see Dena Marie Woodall, “Sharing Space: Double Portraiture in Renaissance Italy,” PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2008, 115–25.

with sincerity].¹⁶ Carafa continues his advice in the same vein, telling Eleonora to only speak to Ercole if he speaks first, and “quando non ve parlasse, meno la Signoria Vostra parlo ad lui, altro che averli fatte le salute, como ò dicto, dela maiestà del Re” [if he were not speak to you, then so much the less should Your Ladyship say to him, other than greeting him, as I have said, on behalf of the king].

Carafa then turns to the possibility that Ercole may be on foot when they meet. She is then to dismount, to approach him and to touch his hand, “colle meno parole sia possebele, ché in onne loco se usa lo vocabele che amo femmena pronta ma non di casa mia” [with as few words as possible, because they have the same proverb everywhere: I love a woman with a ready tongue, but not in my house!].¹⁷

Finally, when she arrives in Ferrara, Eleonora is to praise everything about the city, the countryside and the accommodation that has been provided for her, “mostrando de tucto de starve contenta...acarizando quelli vostre suditi cossi donne como omene” [showing yourself to be happy with everything, ... embracing those subjects of yours, both women and men]. Most importantly, when she is with her husband she must:

mostrare onorarlo de stare in piè dove lui sia, di responderli con reverentia, dirli o sì o non, e delle cose lui ve domandasse mostrate sempre lo piacere vostro essere quello pare e piace ad isso, e che avite deliberato onne vostra volentà reverterella ad la volentà soa, pregandolo [che] ve nde done sempre noticia, che non sarà di bisogno intenderlo se non una volta [to show that you honour your husband by remaining standing in his presence, by replying to him with respect, by telling him either yes or no, and, when he asks

¹⁶ This is Carafa’s only *memoriale* not dedicated to a particular member of either the royal family or his own, suggesting that it was advice he thought he should give to all young wives, regardless of their status. Carafa’s first line announces his purpose in writing the piece: “Perché multe volte accade se maritano de le donne sì iuvene, che ragionevelemente non sapino quelli havino da fare per compiacerno a lloro mariti, et fareno quello, bona et virtuosa mulglyere deve fare” [Because it happens very often that ladies are married when they are very young, so that with reason they do not know what they have to do be agreeable to their husbands, and to do what a good and virtuous wife should do]; see Carafa, “Memoriale et recordo de quello have da fare la mulglyere per stare ad bene con suo marito et in che modo se have ahonestare,” in his *Memoriali*, 245–54 (248).

¹⁷ This proverb appears in essence as “Amo donna pronta, ma non de casa mia,” in Masuccio Salernitano, *Il novellino*, ed. Alfredo Mauro (Bari: Laterza, 1940), 218 (Novella XXIII). Salernitano was a contemporary of Carafa, and dedicated various *novelle* to members of the court. On Carafa’s frequent use of proverbs, see Lupis, “Note linguistiche” in Carafa, *Memoriali*, 404–08.

something of you, always show that your pleasure is whatever he likes and pleases him, and that you have determined that your every wish will revert to his, asking him to always inform you of it so that it will only be necessary to hear it once].

The strongly didactic character of this document adds to the certainty that it is the work of Diomede Carafa, although his dictatorial style may be excused on the grounds that he is in effect advising Eleonora *in loco parentis*, and out of affection. This reinforces the perception, which his letters to Ercole before the marriage have already created, that Carafa sees himself in a quasi-grandfatherly role in his relationship with Eleonora, intent on imparting to her all the lessons he has learned during his long and varied service to her father, and to his father before him. By contrast, despite his obvious affection for her, Ferrante's instructions for Eleonora's journey are hard-headed and impersonal, showing little concern for how she will manage the difficult task ahead.

Ferrante's Instructions to his Daughter

There is no doubt that Ferrante is the author of the second set of instructions for Eleonora's journey to Ferrara. Although the script is that of a secretary, the document bears Ferrante's distinctive signature, the date, 29 May 1473, and place of origin, Casale Arnone, a village near Aversa, a day's ride from Naples.¹⁸ Notar Giacomo writes that Ferrante and Eleonora's brothers had escorted her *comitiva* from Naples on 24 May 1473, apparently staying with her at Casale Arnone for several days before she continued on her way.¹⁹ Ferrante's *Instructio* is unambiguous in its purpose, resembling more closely those instructions given to departing ambassadors prior to a mission, and not wasting words on the niceties of sentiment and manners.

¹⁸ ASMo, Casa e Stato, Ramo ducale, Documenti spettanti a principi estensi, Principi non regnanti, busta 19, Instructions from Ferrante I to Eleonora d'Aragona, Casale Arnone, 29 May 1473; see Appendix, Document 4.

¹⁹ The diarist writes: "et alli 24 decto fo lo suo discesso da Napoli per terra, et a quella fe compagnia la predicta Maestà et tucti li soy figlioli et signori del regno per terra" [on 24 of that month she left Naples by land, and she was accompanied by land by His Majesty and all his sons and the barons of the kingdom]; see Notar Giacomo, 126.

Eleonora's meeting with Sixtus IV in Rome is at the top of Ferrante's list of priorities and he wastes no time getting to the point. She is first to inquire after the pontiff's state of health in the bad air of the Roman summer, begging him "havere cura dela soa persona, in laquale consiste la salute nostra et de tucta la christianità" [to take care of himself, on whom our health and that of the whole of Christendom depends], and offering him an unlimited stay anywhere in the *Regno*.²⁰ Ferrante's concern for Sixtus's health was not excessive given the prevalence of outbreaks of malaria in low-lying parts of Rome, including the Vatican, in the summer months of July, August and September.²¹ There is also little doubt that Ferrante's solicitude towards Sixtus was in no small part inspired by the desire to preserve the new spirit of accord between himself and the pontiff, and the benefits that came with that friendship, which was in sharp contrast to his stormy relationship with Sixtus's predecessor, Paul II.²² His need for good relations with successive Popes would remain a major problem for Ferrante, arising from his dependence on papal consent for reconfirmation of his investiture as king of Naples.²³ The reign of Sixtus IV, at least in its early years, gave Ferrante an unaccustomed sense of security.

²⁰ Apparently Sixtus IV did not accept Ferrante's offer. Pastor writes that, due to illness, Sixtus spent the summer and autumn of 1473, from 19 July until 13 November, at Tivoli, within the Papal States; see Pastor 4: 249. It appears that Sixtus was just as anxious to show due honour to Eleonora. Egmont Lee writes that "already in May, papal officials in various parts of the States of the Church were ordered to prepare for the arrival of the princess. The district of Vetralla [north of Rome] not only had to arrange for her reception in Ronciglione but also was asked to furnish a minimum of 1,000 pieces of fowl and in addition to such requisitions, the *camera apostolica* spent at least 1,500 florins in cash. Another 2,000 florins were borrowed from the Roman citizen, Pietro Margano, and repaid two years later"; see Lee, 35 and n. 99.

²¹ Robert Sallares, *Malaria and Rome: A History of Malaria in Ancient Italy* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). The custom for dignitaries, who later included popes, to move to the healthier climes of the hills south of Rome appears to have begun in ancient Rome; see Sallares, 201–05.

²² In his biography of Ferrante, Pontieri includes Paul II's description of Ferrante to the Milanese ambassador to Rome as "ficto et de mala natura ... e così scaltro e maligno, che nessuno se ne può fidare" [deceitful and nasty ... and so shrewd and malicious, that no one can trust him]; see Pontieri 1945, 133.

²³ This had been granted by Pius II in 1458. Dover explains Ferrante's dependence on papal goodwill to maintain his position as king of Naples, citing the attempts of the Venetian Pope Eugenius IV (1431–47) to re-establish his temporal, territorial power over the Italian peninsula, including "a reassertion of its traditional role as the feudal lord of the kingdom of Naples"; see Dover, "Royal Diplomacy," 67–68.

Eleonora is to then convey to Sixtus four specific requests from Ferrante: that he raise the archbishop of Salerno and the bishop of Città di Castello to the cardinalate;²⁴ that he look favourably upon the interests of her brother, Alfonso, duke of Calabria; that he continue to show favour to his own nephew, and Ferrante's son-in-law, the prefect of Rome, "loquale havendolo Soa Santità dato per figliolo, lo amamo non altremente che uno deli nostril proprii figlioli" [whom, His Holiness having given him as a son, we love no differently than one of our own sons]; and that His Holiness accept Ferrante's apologies for not sending his natural daughter, and Leonardo della Rovere's wife, Giovanna d'Aragona, to Rome, "per essere lo tempo cussì indisposto et caldo pericoloso ad una figliola di cussì tenera etate, ma al bon tempo se pora farce piacendo a dio et ala Beatitudine Soa" [because the weather is so unfavourable and the heat dangerous for a girl of such tender years, but in good time she will be able go there, God and His Beatitude willing].²⁵

Like Carafa, Ferrante puts less emphasis on Eleonora's visit from the Florentine Signoria than on her meeting with Lorenzo de' Medici. She must assure Lorenzo "del nostro bono animo verso isso et ala conservatione di suo statu loquale reputamo proprio per la virtù soa et amore ne porta" [of our goodwill towards him and towards

²⁴ Pedro Guillermo de Rocha, Archbishop of Salerno (1471–82), and Giovanni Gianderoni, Bishop of Città di Castello 1460–75. Dover writes that Ferrante sent his ambassador, Anello Arcamone, to Rome in June 1473 to advocate their candidacy for the cardinalate; see Dover, "Royal Diplomacy," 70. Pastor writes: "Without any great trouble Ferrante obtained the satisfaction of seeing the rich Abbey of Monte Cassino conferred on his youthful son, while the Protonotary Rocha was made Archbishop of Salerno"; see Pastor, 4:214. Between 1471 and 1484, Sixtus IV created 34 cardinals, including six of his own relatives. Sixtus IV was willing to bestow his goodwill in return for support given: "The letters, by which he notified the Italian powers of his election and asked for their support, indicate clearly his desire to be accepted into their circle. The 'downpour of benefices,' which during the next few weeks descended on the favourites of the ruling houses, demonstrated that he was willing to pay a considerable fee"; see Lee, 32. Giovanni d'Aragona, fourth child of Ferrante, received a cardinal's hat in December 1477.

²⁵ Giovanna d'Aragona was Ferrante's natural daughter by his mistress Diana Guardato. After this marriage the couple had been invested with the fiefs of Sora, Arpino and other territories; see di Fonzo, 56–57 and Pastor, 4:245. This is the young woman with whom Eleonora made "certe zentilezze" [certain kindnesses] to be sent to Ercole in August 1472; see above Chapter 2, 102.

the preservation of his state which we respect really for his virtue and for the love he bears us].

Although Ferrante reveals that he has already told Eleonora what she is to convey to Ercole on his behalf, “*tamen* volimo ancora qui toccarne alcuna particella brevemente per memoriale” [nevertheless, I still want to briefly touch on a few little details in this memorandum].²⁶ She should praise first his brother, Sigismondo, “lo quale et per la virtù et meriti soi, et per essere exempla d’amore de fratello, lo deve amare più como ad figliolo che fratello” [whom, because of his virtue and his merits, and because he is an example of brotherly love, you should love more as a son than as a brother]. She is to praise Ercole’s half-brother, Alberto, “per essere cussi degno et virtuoso cavaleto et havendo cussi ben servito et etiam perché cognoscimo ama ad isso signor duca et suo stato quanto al mundo è possibile” [for being such a worthy and virtuous knight and for having served so well and also because we know that he loves the duke and his state as much as it is humanly possible]. Finally, she is to praise all the Ferrarese gentlemen sent by Ercole to accompany her to Ferrara, “ne so· multo piaciuti tucti et ce so· paresi dignissimi del servitio di Soa Signore et che lo amano grandemente” [all of whom we have liked a lot and they seemed to us most worthy to be in the service of His Lordship and they love him greatly]. Ferrante makes special mention of Teofilo Calcagnini and Niccolò de’ Contrari, for “certamente ne pareno cossi digni et virtuosi ientilomini quanti altri ne habiamo praticati a nostri dì” [certainly they seem as worthy and virtuous as others we have dealt with in our time], and he wishes Eleonora to commend them to Ercole, telling him that “non poterissimo

²⁶ Mattingly writes: “At the final public audience before their departure, ambassadors were usually handed the documents necessary for their mission, their credentials, their instructions and perhaps their powers. But it would be presumably at some prior and less public conference that Rosier advised all envoys to have their instructions orally explained to them. In oral conference, questions could be asked and doubts resolved; see Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (New York: Dover, 1988), 32. Bernard du Rosier was the author of a “Short Treatise about Ambassadors” (1436).

tanto direne quanto più havimo volontà lo facciate” [you could not say as much about them as we would want you to]. Finally, Ferrante’s suggestion that, when she is with her husband Eleonora should, “lo pregarite ne done noticia di tucto perché deve credere le cose soe nui le reputemo proprie nostre” [beg him to inform us of everything because he should believe that we regard his affairs as our own], will be seen to mean different things to Ercole at different stages of his relationship with the king.

Eleonora’s youth and inexperience had apparently been a cause of concern for both Carafa and Ferrante as she set off on what appears to have been her first diplomatic exercise beyond the borders of the *Regno*. While Ferrante’s instructions were apparently a confirmation of what he had already told his daughter *a bocca* and reveal nothing new about his foreign relations, Carafa’s work gives new insights into the complexities of fifteenth-century diplomatic protocol, especially in the sphere of gift-giving. His directions to Eleonora about her first meeting with Ercole suggest that he understood very well the reservations the duke would have about being out-ranked by his much younger wife, and her response to that advice would surely have been appreciated.

The Visit to Rome

Within a month of the election of Francesco della Rovere as Pope Sixtus IV on 9 August 1471, the Mantuan ambassador to the papal court, Bartolomeo Bonatto, wrote of the new spirit of goodwill displayed by the new pontiff: “Questo papa monstra voler star bene con ogniuno” [This Pope seems to want to be on good terms with everyone].²⁷ Naples had been an early beneficiary of Sixtus’s desire to establish friendly relations his fellow Italian rulers, with the constant disputes between Ferrante and Paul II replaced by

²⁷ Pastor, 4: 214.

concessions, often at Sixtus's expense.²⁸ In Ferrante's favour, within a month of Sixtus's election, the income of the rich Abbey of Monte Cassino was conferred on his young son, Giovanni d'Aragona, while the Apostolic Protonotary, Pedro Guillermo de Rocha, was made Archbishop of Salerno.²⁹ In spring 1472, a marriage had been arranged between Ferrante's natural daughter, Giovanna d'Aragona, and Sixtus's nephew, Leonardo della Rovere, who had been appointed Prefect of Rome by Sixtus earlier that year, on the death of the previous, non-clerical, incumbent, Antonio Colonna.³⁰ As a concession to the marriage alliance, Sixtus had relinquished his right of sovereignty over Sora, Arpino and other territories and Ferrante had responded by conferring those fiefs on the couple.³¹ Of Ferrante's customary feudal tribute to the papacy, a major point of dispute under Paul II, only the traditional annual gift of a white palfrey, the *chineia*, remained. In return, Ferrante had agreed to take part in any war against the Turks,³² to defend the coasts of the papal territories from pirates and to provide military support to the pope, if such

²⁸ Pastor, 4:245. On the arrival in Rome of the various embassies of obedience to Sixtus IV, see Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lettere I (1460–1474)*, ed. Riccardo Fubini (Florence: Giunti-Barbera, 1977), 337–38, n. 3. Fubini suggests that “Re Ferrante aveva subordinato l’invio dell’ambasciata d’obbedienza all’accoglimento delle sue rivendicazioni, che il Papa aveva sottoposto a una commissione cardinalizia” [King Ferrante had subordinated the sending of the embassy of obedience to the acceptance of his demands, which the pope had submitted to a committee of cardinals; see Medici, *Lettere*, 1:338, n. 8

²⁹ Pontieri writes that, in September 1471, the sixteen-year-old Giovanni d'Aragona had been sent to Rome to extend Ferrante's congratulations to the new pontiff. He suggests that the oration which Giovanni gave before Sixtus may have been composed by Diomede Carafa or Giovanni's tutor, Pietro Ranzano; see Pontieri 1963, 134. Giovanni d'Aragona was made a cardinal in the consistory of December 1477. Fubini describes Rocha as the “abituale rappresentante del Re in Curia, eletto il 30 agosto arcivescovo di Salerno” [permanent representative of the king in the Curia]; see Medici, *Lettere*, 1:341. Pontieri describes Rocha as “una creatura di Ferrante ... di origine spagnola” [a protégé of Ferrante ... originally Spanish]; see Pontieri 1963, 134, n. 58.

³⁰ Jill E. Blondin, “Power Made Visible: Pope Sixtus IV as *Urbis Restaurator* in Quattrocento Rome,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 91 (2005): 7–8.

³¹ Pastor, 4:245. Giovanna d'Aragona thus became Duchess of Sora on her marriage to Leonardo della Rovere in 1472. Another confirmation of the friendship between Ferrante and Sixtus was the presence in Ferrara for Eleonora's wedding of “lo Signore Duca di Suora, nepote del papa, cioè papa Sisto” [the duke of Sora, nephew of the pope, that is Pope Sixtus]; see Caleffini, 47.

³² As early as 23 December 1471, Sixtus had established five anti-Turkish legations *de latere*, according to which Cardinal Bessarion, was to travel to France, Burgundy and England, Cardinal Rodrigo to Spain, Cardinal Capranica to Italy, Cardinal Barbo to Germany, Hungary and Poland, Cardinal Oliviero Carafa to the kingdom of Naples. On 31 December, he published an encyclical “urging the united action of Christendom against the common foe”; see Kenneth M. Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant (1204–1571)*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1978), 2:315.

were needed, and at his own expense.³³ In October 1472, Sixtus IV had agreed to the annulment of Eleonora d’Aragona’s marriage to Sforza Maria Sforza, clearing the way for a new alliance between Naples and Ferrara. In the same year, the Neapolitan humanist and printer, Giovanni Filippo de Lignamine, an old friend of the pope, dedicated his panegyric in praise of Ferrante, *Incltyi Ferdinandi Regis Vita et Laudes*, to Sixtus.³⁴

In accordance with his ambition that his extended family should be accepted as an Italian ruling house, Sixtus had quickly set about creating a brilliant court in Rome, authorising his young and ambitious nephew, Pietro Riario, whom he had created Cardinal of San Sisto in the consistory of December 1471, to employ the vast resources of the church to achieve that end. The court which Riario created at Sixtus’s instigation was to become an essential part of papal diplomatic machinery, dazzling with its displays of opulence and excess, “even the citizens of Rome, to whom this kind of ostentation on the part of cardinals was no novelty.”³⁵ The visit of the daughter of the king of Naples, his uncle’s powerful new ally, would provide Riario with the opportunity to display not only the enormous financial resources at his disposal but also his own personal, flamboyant, style and his exceptional organisational skills. The series of receptions, banquets and theatrical entertainments staged in Eleonora’s honour were characterised by such luxury and magnificence that they have become part of the history of spectacle and theatre in Rome.³⁶ Despite her relative youth and inexperience and the rather over*whelming nature of Riario’s elaborately stage-managed events, Eleonora conducted

³³ Pastor, 4:246.

³⁴ Published, minus a few passages, in Pontieri 1963, 140–58.

³⁵ Lee, 33. In February 1473, Riario had organised a lavish banquet with accompanying entertainment for an exotic mix of invitees, including all the foreign ambassadors resident in Rome, four cardinals, his della Rovere cousins, the Prefect and the cardinal Giuliano, and even some minor Byzantine royalty. Although on a smaller scale, it bore all the hallmarks of the entertainment staged for Eleonora’s party four months later. Giovanni Arcimboldo wrote to Galeazzo Maria Sforza in Milan that the feast lasted fully three hours, and before every course the seneschal appeared on horseback to the sound of music, and each time in a fresh costume; see Pastor, 4:240. Arcimboldo, the Milanese bishop of Novara, was created cardinal by Sixtus in May 1473 “as part of the rapprochement with Galeazzo Sforza”; see Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court*, 163.

³⁶ On the Roman visit, see the titles cited above, n. 8–9.

herself with assurance and dignity during her visit to Rome, to the admiration of those who observed her every move.

Teofilo Calcagnini: a personal account of the visit to Rome

There are two long and detailed letters that contain contemporary descriptions of the events which occupied Eleonora's Roman visit. One of these is from Eleonora herself, written to Diomede Carafa on 10 June 1473 from Campagnano where the *comitiva* had repaired for the night on their onward journey from Rome. This letter no longer exists in its original form, having been included in Corvisieri's 1887 article on Eleonora's Roman visit without citing its source.³⁷ Eleonora's letter also lacks the name of its addressee, but her reference to him as "Signor Conte," and her request that he should pass her news on to her father, brothers, sister and Misser Paschale, suggest that she is writing to Diomede Carafa. As this letter has also been reproduced in Cruciani's book on Renaissance theatre (1983), the emphasis here will be on a previously unedited letter which was located during the course of this research in the Library of Università degli Studi di Padova. This letter was written by Teofilo Calcagnini to Ercole on 7 June 1473, while Eleonora and her party were still in Rome.³⁸

Calcagnini begins his "inepta inornata littera" [inept, simple letter] to Ercole, advising him of "il felice introito de la Vostra Illustrissima Madama duchessa, vostra preclarissima consorte cum la sua comitiva in questa alma città di Roma di cinque de questo" [the successful entry of Your Most Illustrious Madama duchess, your most excellent consort, with her party, into this glorious city of Rome on the fifth of this

³⁷ Corvisieri 1887, 645–54.

³⁸ Letter from Teophilo Calcagnini to Ercole d'Este, Rome, 7 June 1473, Padua, Biblioteca Universitaria, MS 342, cc. 54v–59r. Appendix, Document 5. This letter is cited in Pastor, 4: 243 and Falletti, 275, n. 54.

month]. Far from being a simple, inept letter, this example of Calcagnini's epistolary craft bears all the hallmarks of his earlier letter from Naples, the same meticulous description of celebratory events – triumphal progresses, banquets and receptions – and the almost ingenuous sincerity of his expressions of admiration for his lord's young bride, that leads him to occasionally emerge from the text and break into direct speech.³⁹ In this letter, as in its predecessor, he is insistent that Ercole has done well to acquire this charming young princess as his wife, no small recommendation from this cultivated and beautiful young man, who had moved with seeming ease from being Borso d'Este's closest companion to a position of equal trust at Ercole's court.⁴⁰

It is Calcagnini's descriptions of Eleonora herself, her charm, her self-possession and her dignity, which distinguish this letter from the princess's own. While his descriptions of the events themselves are no pale imitation of hers, he alone has been able to observe her minutely, whether it be riding in triumph through the streets of Rome, taking pleasure in the sumptuous events staged in her honour, or simply kneeling in humility at the feet of Sixtus IV (Fig.4).⁴¹

³⁹ ASMo, Cancelleria Ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Napoli, busta 1, letter from Teophilo Calcagnini to Ercole d'Este, Naples, incomplete and undated, but from contents written within days of 16 May 1473. Appendix, Document 2.

⁴⁰ Teofilo Calcagnini is described by Pardi as "principale compagno del duca Borso ... creato conte con la facultà di legittimare bastardi e nominare notari dall'Imperatore Federico III ... [che] accompagna alla sepoltura il primo ministro del duca Borso" [Duke Borso's principal companion ... created count with the right to legitimate bastards and nominate notaries by Emperor Frederick III ... [who] accompanies Duke Borso's prime minister to his interment]. On the day of Borso's funeral, the diarist writes, "il prefacto signore duca Hercole fece di molti doni et gratie a più persone; et fece suo compagno il magnifico messer Theophilo Calcagnino, attribuendoli et lassandoli tutti li honori et emolumenti che la sua Magnificentia havea havuto con il duca Borso, se a la sua Magnificentia pareva et piaceva" [Duke Ercole conferred many gifts and favours on a number of people; and he made Messer Teofilo Calcagnino his companion, granting and continuing all the honours and emoluments that His Magnificence had had with Duke Borso, if His Magnificence wished and desired]; see *Diario ferrarese*, 71 and 295. His wife, Marietta Strozzi, accompanied Eleonora to Venice in February 1476; see Zambotti, 4 and n. 14. A Calcagnini-d'Este archive in the Archivio di Stato in Modena contains documents which chart the family's history from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries; see ASMo, Archivio Calcagnini d'Este, buste 77–79.

⁴¹ Eunice Howe, *The Hospital of Santo Spirito and Pope Sixtus IV* (New York: Garland, 1978), plate 36, 405; *ibid*, *Art and Culture at the Sistine Court* (Vatican: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2005), Fig. 38, 239. Blondin describes the hospital as "one of Sixtus' most ambitious projects"; see Blondin, 11.

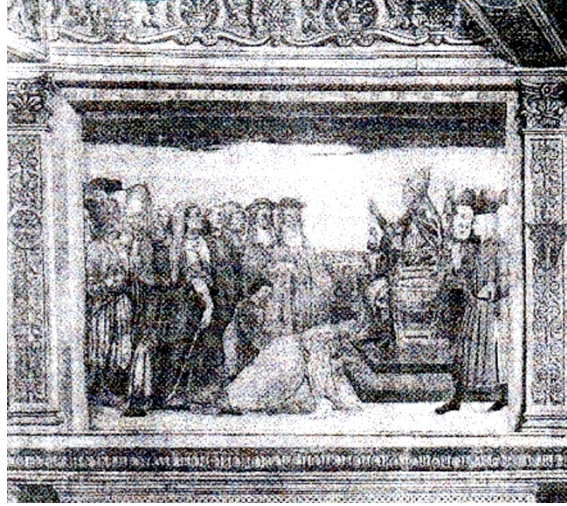


Figure 4: Eleonora d'Aragona kisses the feet of Sixtus IV in St Peter's, Rome 1473. Fresco. Rome, Santo Spirito in Sassia, Corsia Sistina.

This last scene is the subject of one panel in a fresco cycle on the life of Sixtus IV which decorates the *Corsia Sistina*, the principal ward of the Ospedale di Santo Spirito in Sassia in Rome, commenced by Sixtus in 1474 as part of an ambitious programme of urban renewal.

Eleonora's vast *comitiva* had reached Rome on the eve of Pentecost, 5 June 1473, after spending the previous night in the Alban Hills at Marino. They were met three miles outside the city walls by a large party of religious dignitaries, led by Cardinal Oliviero Carafa, Archbishop of Naples, and the recently-appointed Spanish cardinal of Monreale, Ausio de Podio, and escorted by them to the Lateran Palace. There they rested and dined before being taken to see the holy relics of the heads of St Peter and St Paul.⁴² At about noon, the Cardinals of San Sisto, Pietro Riario, and of San Pietro in Vincoli, Giuliano della Rovere,⁴³ arrived on horseback, sent by Sixtus to accompany Eleonora's party through the streets of Rome to Riario's palace in Piazza Santissimi

⁴² Eleonora's welcome by such an august group of churchmen, who had travelled three miles into the *contado* to meet her, reflects Sixtus' desire to show honour to his new ally, Ferrante. Trexler describes the ritual of the civic welcome to visiting dignitaries, "for the welcoming party to travel any significant distance from the city was a signal honor, carefully recorded by chroniclers"; see Trexler, *Public Life*, 308.

⁴³ Giuliano della Rovere succeeded to the papal throne as Julius II on 28 November 1503.

Apostoli. Calcagnini painted for Ercole a delightful picture of “la madama vostra vestita a sua guisa de veluto negro, cum una bavera de dicto pano et uno capeleto negro cum certe pene bianche inante adornata de infinite perle e zoglie, pareva veramente uno angelo” [your Madama, dressed, as she is accustomed, in black velvet with a cloak in the same fabric and a little black hat with white feathers in the front and it was adorned with countless pearls and jewels. She really looked like an angel in the midst of those two cardinals and the prelates].

It is in his description of Eleonora’s meeting with Sixtus IV in *Capella Grande* of St Peter’s, where he had just celebrated the Mass of Pentecost, that Calcagnini became particularly effusive in his expressions of admiration for Ercole’s young wife. He had begun his description when the *comitiva* at Riario’s palace to escort Eleonora to St Peter’s:

Questa matina autem che è el zorno sollemno delo Pentecoste la comitiva nostra se ne itò a Sancto Apostolo et li ha montato a cavallo la Vostra Illustrissima Madama vestita di brochato d’oro cum sue mirabele colane e zoglie, e posta in mezo di Sancto Sixto e di Sancto Pietro in Vincula cum le soe matrone e gentildone et la brigata nostra inanti ben vestiti e adornati, cum quilli etiam de la Maestà de lo Re” [This morning which is also the holy day of Pentecost, our party went on horseback to St Apostolo and there Your Most Illustrious Madama mounted a horse, dressed in gold brocade with her wonderful necklaces and jewels, and she rode between <the cardinals of> San Sisto and San Pietro in Vincoli with her matrons of honour and gentlewomen, and our group rode in front, well dressed and adorned, together with His Majesty the King’s party].

During the Mass, Eleonora had sat with her ladies in a stand which had been specially constructed for the occasion, then after the Mass was over:

La Vostra Illustrissima Madama cum grandissimo honore fu menata al conspecto de la Santità del Nostro Signore et lei reverente, humile getandoli ali piedi per basarli, Sua Beatitudine non volse et pòrsige la mano, la qual basiata se getèti ali piedi et Sua Sanctità la ricolse e acarezòla, e veduta fu tropo caritativamente, et honorevolmente quanto per lo più dire si puotesse [Your Most Illustrious Madama was conducted with the greatest honour into the presence of His Holiness the Pope and reverently and humbly she cast

herself at his feet in order to kiss them. His Holiness would not allow it and offered her his hand, which she kissed and then threw herself at his feet, and His Holiness gathered her up and embraced her, and she was received with more loving charity and honour than words can describe].

There are echoes here of Carafa's admonition to Eleonora that she should ask Sixtus to look upon her as a daughter, and, judging from this demonstration of affection towards her, Sixtus does appear to have been much taken with the young princess. He had recently presided over the lengthy process of her divorce from Sforza Maria Sforza, so knew her by reputation at least. In her letter to Carafa, Eleonora wrote that she had also made two private visits to Sixtus, although she gave no clue to what had passed between them. The first of these visits had been after Pietro Riario's banquet in her honour. The personable young cardinal had accompanied Eleonora to visit Sixtus, who, she wrote, "ne vede volentieri et fecene gran caricze" [was glad to see us and was very affectionate towards us], before presenting her with a diamond brooch, two camels and a dappled horse.⁴⁴ The following Wednesday, she had returned with Oliviero Carafa, cardinal of Naples, to Sixtus's apartments, where they found him with the cardinal of San Sisto, Pietro Riario. His Holiness had given them "grata audientia" [gracious audience] and "gran quantità de *Agnus dei* tanto ad nuy quanto ad tucta la compagnia" [a great number of wax impressions of the *Agnus dei*, both for us and for the whole company].⁴⁵ Sixtus also gave her permission to visit the *Volto santo* [Veil of Veronica], in the company of the two cardinals.

Clearly quite overcome by the memory of Eleonora's meeting with Sixtus, and with his admiration for Eleonora's youthful *gravitas*, Calcagnini then embarked on an extravagant eulogy in her praise, extolling the bounty she would bring to Ferrara as Ercole's consort:

⁴⁴ Corvisieri 1887, 653.

⁴⁵ Corvisieri 1887, 653. Neither of these visits is reported by Calcagnini.

Illustrissimo Signore mio, non dico per adulare ma *ut mera utar veritate*, alcuni de questi gardenali maravigliosamente laudavano questa vostra madona del suo pesato e grave parlare tuto sententioso et bene a verso che veramente Tulio li perderia de eloquentia.⁴⁶ Quostei certamente *communi hominum iudicio* hè uno spirito angelico e divino. Ho idio, quanto Vostra Celsitudine hè bem beato de tanto superno lume! Ho, quanto li vostri populi debeno *iure debito* iubilare e far festa de tanta vostra ferma collona et gridare ‘Leonora, Leonora!’ per mare, terra e monti, che in verità se li populi de Vostra Excellentia, dico *cadauna arte ubique locorum*, facesse una festa de lo advenimento de questa vostra desiderata spene, non se potrebbe satisfare ala minima parte del debito nostro quanto più ornate et eccellente feste se facesseno. [My Most Illustrious Lord, I don’t say this out of flattery but because it is the truth, several of those cardinals wonderfully praised Your Lady for her considered and serious way of speaking, which was so authoritative and so perceptive that Tullius Cicero would be struck dumb. Certainly, by everyone’s common agreement, she is an angelic and divine soul. O God, Your Excellency is indeed blessed with such a supreme luminary! Oh, how rightly your people shall rejoice and celebrate because you have such a strong support and they shall shout “Leonora, Leonora!” over all the sea, land and hills. In truth, if Your Excellency’s people, and I mean every person in every place, were to celebrate the arrival of your hope and joy, it would not satisfy the smallest part of the debt we owe for such elaborate and excellent celebrations.]

Calcagnini’s account Eleonora’s first meeting with Sixtus IV would be complemented by that of another member of Sigismondo’s party in Rome, a man provisionally identified as Niccolò Bonfiglioli, who wrote to Ercole, describing the same scene.⁴⁷ He echoed Calcagnini’s admiration for Eleonora’s dignified bearing and the eloquence with which she had addressed Sixtus, but in less excessive terms: “nostra madama disse alcune poche parole de tanta substantia et sì compositamente che fu in admiration al papa et tutti l’altri che oldeno” [our Madama spoke some few words of such substance and such style that the pope and all the others who heard them were

⁴⁶ Calcagnini’s specific reference to Tullius Cicero may have been inspired by the publication of Cicero’s *Phillipics* in Rome 1470; see Lee, 94–95 and n. 38.

⁴⁷ Olivi, 38–39. Olivi’s article is the only source for this letter and he gives no indication of its location. The identity of the author is uncertain. While Olivi suggests that it is Bonfiglio, he gives no reasons for this attribution. “The Bonfiglioli are described as a “cospicua famiglia borghese” [notable family of the city] by Pardi; see Zambotti, 373. Niccolò Bonfiglioli is listed as Mayor of Codegoro in the “Distributio officiorum” for 1477; see Caleffini, 228.

full of admiration.” The writer had also marvelled at the warmth of Sixtus’s welcome to Eleonora:

No ve dico de lha rachoianza et piasevoleza del papa che più non haria fatto ad una sua fiola como però sempre lha nomina. Per quella hora che era tarda et incompetente no· se disse più se non che lha Santità de Nostro Signore instessa dette ordene de una audienza longa et grata ala qualle ozi se lhi andava. [I can’t tell you <enough> about the attentiveness and pleasantness of the pope which was more than if she had been his own daughter, which is what he always calls her. Because the hour was late and not appropriate, no more was said, except that that His Holiness himself gave orders for a long and gracious audience to which we went today.]

Eleonora’s audience with Sixtus had clearly been regarded with some awe by Ercole’s correspondents, who appeared to only see it as an indication of the young woman’s own qualities, rather than as confirmation of the pope’s alliance with Ferrante.

Calcagnini followed his description of Eleonora’s papal audience with a paean in praise of the young cardinal of San Sisto, Pietro Riario, the orchestrator of the festivities in Eleonora’s honor. In the most sycophantic of terms, Calcagnini manages to convey something of the young prelate’s charm and charisma:

Illustrissimo mio signore, quostui è uno prelato nato da uno Cesaro più magnanimo, più liberale e splendido che prelato che fuse mai, acepto et amato da tuto questo colegio de gardenali e da questo populo romano, quanto fuse mai gardenale veruno et bem el merita, conzosiaché l’è alter pontifex, al quale concore l’altra turba de gardenali et ciò che Sua Signoria comete e ordina [f. 57r] è facto *in omnibus et per omnia* et questo è lo evangelio. Lui è bello quanto la natura potesse fare ridente, piacevole, bel parlatore, niuno se parte da Sua Signoria mal contento. Lui è tanto faceto, tuto iocondo, dolce, suave et ameno, et per quanto Sua Signoria me ha parlato lo ama ultra modo et più che figliolo Vostra Eccellenza et ha ardentissimo desiderio de fare cosa gratissima a Vostra Eccellenza. A mi autem per gratia de Sua Signoria et per amore di Vostra Eccellenza el me ha acarezato tanto et facto tante offerte che desta uno stupore. Siano del tuto laudato l’omnipotente idio et in spetialità de la bona gratia ha Vostra Eccellenza cum questo glorioso monsignore gardenale che dio el campi in questo stado 100 anni como el merita. [My Most Illustrious Lord, this prelate is as one born of an emperor, he is more generous, more liberal and splendid than ever a prelate was before him; he is received and loved by

all the College of Cardinals, and by the Roman people, as much as he was ever a more genuine cardinal and indeed he deserves it, inasmuch as he is the alternative pope, and the alternate group of cardinals throngs around him and whatever he commissions and orders is done in every case and in all respects, and this is the gospel truth. He is as handsome as nature could make him, laughing, pleasant, a good talker, no one leaves His Lordship's presence unhappy. He is so humorous, cheerful, sweet-natured, gentle and easy-going, and from all that His Lordship has told me, he loves Your Excellency beyond measure and more than a son, and that he has a burning desire to please Your Excellency. Moreover, by the grace of his Lordship and on account of his love for Your Excellency, he has shown me such affection and made me so many offers that I'm amazed. May Almighty God be praised, and especially for the good grace Your Excellency enjoys with the glorious Monsignor Cardinal, and may God preserve him in this state for a hundred years as he deserves.]

Despite these hopes for Riario's longevity, the cardinal was to die within six months, on 3 January 1474, most probably as a result of his excessive lifestyle (although there was talk of poisoning), not long after completing an extensive tour of the Italian peninsula as Sixtus's *legatus a latere* [personal legate].⁴⁸

Calcagnini was also very taken with Riario's palace, which, he assured Ercole, was "adornato non mancho che se Sancto Pietro de celo in terra descendesse" [decorated no less than if St Peter were to come down to earth from heaven]. Describing the magnificence of the arrangements, the sumptuous furnishings on every bed and the costly tapestries in every room, he concluded: "È meglio comprendo che se 'l fuse venuto a Roma lo Imperatore non li seria sta facto tanto aparecho così solemne e grande" [And I truly believe that, if the Emperor himself had come to Rome, there would not have been made such a solemn and grand preparations].⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Pastor, 4:250–53. Riario visited Ferrara as part of this tour from 13–15 October 1473, accommodated at Ercole's expense "in le camere nove...aparete tute de pani d'oro" [in the new apartments ... completely furnished in cloth of gold] and "fu visto dal duca et da madama Eleonora tanto volentiera quanto mai dire de potesse" [the duke and Madama Eleonora received him with every goodwill possible]; see Caleffini, 56.

⁴⁹ Calcagnini's description of this event is complemented by that of Eleonora, published by Corvisieri (1887) and Cruciani. It has long been suspected that a third account, that of the Milanese historian, Bernardino Corio, was not contemporary but that it was at least in part based on Calcagnini's letter; see

The most spectacular event of the Roman visit was the banquet staged in Eleonora's honour by Pietro Riario on the Monday of Pentecost in a purpose-built pavilion in front of his palace in Piazza Santissimi Apostoli. Calcagnini spared no superlative in his descriptions of the luxuriousness of the appointments, pointing particularly to the quantity of gold and silver plate which had remained unused on the huge credenza, and the inventiveness and abundance of the courses of every kind of meat and poultry, and the spectacular theatrical *intermezzi* interspersed between them.⁵⁰ The theatricality of the event was clearly intended to astound and amaze the assembled guests, from “el Seschalcho ad ogni vivanda sempre de veste se mutava” [the seneschal who changed his outfit for every course], to the tableau staged to honour Ercole himself:

Ma intenda Vostra Eccellenza che in tavola per vivande in confectione hano portato tute le fatiche de Hercule, cadauno grande in statura de uno homo, et primo Hercule nudo cum la pelle et una nuvola cum stelle dentro in spalla in significatione de tignire el cielo. Et così seguendo tute le representatione de le fatiche de Hercule [But Your Excellency should know that, at the same time as one of the courses of sweetmeats, the labours of Hercules were brought to the table, each with life-sized figures, the first Hercules, naked apart from an animal pelt, and with a starry nimbus behind him, representing him supporting the heavens. And following on came the representation of all the labours of Hercules].

These spectacles lasted for seven hours, at the end of which Calcagnini was able to assure his lord:

Questo è stato el più ordinato et el più sumptuoso pasto che fuse mai, né che mai credo serà. [...] In questo di bene Sancto Sixto ha dimonstrato la grandeza de l'animo suo et

Bernardino Corio, *Storia di Milano*, ed. Anna Morisi Guerra, 2 vols. (Turin: UTET, 1978), 2:1385–92. Corio's account is also included in Cruciani, 161–64. A comparison between the accounts of Corio and Calcagnini reveals a number of discrepancies, suggesting that there may have been another source for Corio's account, possibly a letter from Filippo Sacramoro to Galeazzo Maria Sforza conserved in the *Archivio di Stato* in Milan; see Pastor, 4:243 (notes).

⁵⁰ A similar presentation of tableaux and other diversions between courses is recorded at the wedding feast of Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy, and Margaret of York in Bruges in 1468. Such diversions, referred to as *entremets* [between courses] by the Burgundians, are described in the catalogue of a major exhibition on Charles the Bold held in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna in 2009; see *Charles the Bold (1433–1477): Splendour of Burgundy*, ed. Susan Marti, Till-Holger Borchert and Gabrielle Keck (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2009), 292.

quanto lo ama Vostra Illustrissima Signoria. [This has been the best organised and the most sumptuous feast there has ever been, or that I think will ever be. [...] This day San Sisto has indeed demonstrated the greatness of his spirit and how much he loves Your Most Illustrious Lordship.]

In a charming acknowledgement of her own sweet tooth, in her own account of the banquet to Carafa, Eleonora embellished Calcagnini's "dice galee grande cum le velle e corde tute de confeti" [ten large galleys with sails and ropes made completely of sugar] as:

Confectere X con X navi de zuccaro de sopra piene de gliandi (ghirlande) et rose de zuccaro et X con pinochyata in forma de pissci de diverse manere [...] frectelle de sambuco et lemboni sciruppati in tasse X argentate [Ten dessert dishes holding ten boats filled with sugar garlands and roses, and ten <more> with sweet almond pastry in the shape of different types of fish [...] elderberry *frittelle* and lemon syrup in ten silver cups].

Neither Eleonora nor Calcagnini left their readers in any doubt of the great honour that had been paid to Eleonora and her party by Sixtus through the agency of his flamboyant nephew and the Church's gold. Even one of the pope's harshest critics, the Roman diarist, Stefano Infessura, was forced to concede that the event was "una delle belle cose che mai fosse fatta in Roma, et anco fuori di Roma" [one of the most beautiful things that was ever done in Rome, and even beyond Rome].⁵¹

The Onward Journey to Ferrara

The great respect accorded to Eleonora and her party in Rome was replicated (if only on a smaller scale) in the towns of the Papal States, where, from the beginning of May, orders had been sent by papal officials to prepare for the arrival of Eleonora and her party. The Cardinal Chamberlain, Latino Orsini, had written to Ludovico Agnelli,

⁵¹ Stefano Infessura, *Diario della città di Roma di Stefano Infessura, scribasenato*, ed. Oreste Tommasini (Rome: Istituto Storico d'Italia, 1890), 77. Infessura, a long-time secretary of the Roman Senate, was pro-Colonna and vehemently anti-papal.

Protonotary and Governor of the Patrimony on 8 May 1473 to inform him that: “The duchess of Ferrara will soon pass, and is to be honorably received in Sutri, Viterbo, and Montefiascone, according to the pope’s wishes. Even though the papal commissioners will come ahead of her to see that all is in good order, preparations should begin long before their arrival.”⁵²

Eleonora wrote to Carafa from Campagnano, a day’s ride from Rome, that when her party had departed from Rome on 10 June, they had been accompanied “uno bon peczo de fore de Roma” [for a good way beyond Rome] by their four cardinal hosts, San Sisto, San Pietro in Vinculi, Naples and Monreale. The visit could only be regarded as a triumph by all concerned; due honour had been paid to the princess and her party, Ferrante’s new alliance with Sixtus had been vindicated, and Sixtus’s display of magnificence had shown him to be a worthy member of the princely group to which he aspired.

Eleonora’s letter to Carafa from Florence is all that survives from what was apparently a regular series of reports written by her along the route to Ferrara.⁵³ Local chronicles reveal that the celebrations in Siena were of a more “domestico” [intimate] nature, and that the *comune* had faced considerable logistic problems hosting, and feeding, Eleonora’s huge retinue of upwards of 1000 people, their mounts and other baggage animals. The diarist, Allegretto Allegretti, describes a ball, held in a giant pavilion in the street outside the house of Tommaso Pecci, to which were invited “tutte le belle donne e fanciulle di Siena” [all the fair matrons and maidens of Siena].⁵⁴

Having stayed in Siena for four days, “la notte a ore 6 tra 20 e 21 di giugno si partirono di Siena i detti Signori con la Duchessa per caminar per lo fresco” [in the very early hours of the morning between 20 and 21 June, the nobles left with the

⁵² Lee, 35, n. 99.

⁵³ For Eleonora’s letter to Carafa from Florence, dated 25 June 1473, see Corvisieri 1887, 655–56.

⁵⁴ Falletti, 281.

duchess in order to travel in the cool air], and so that they might arrive in Florence in time for the Feast of San Giovanni Battista, traditionally celebrated on 24 June.⁵⁵ Trexler writes that it was not uncommon for distinguished visitors “to time their arrivals to coincide with the Feast [while] the commune postponed parts of the Feast to accommodate visitors’ itineraries.”⁵⁶ Falletti describes the changed dynamic of Eleonora’s visit to Florence as her party, “lascia i trionfalismi e le eccezionalità per confrontarsi con il gusto e la cultura di una Firenze consapevole della superiorità dei suoi valori” [leaves behind the triumphalism and the exceptional to confront the taste and culture of a Florence aware of the superiority of her values].⁵⁷

In his instructions to Eleonora about her visit to Florence, Ferrante had requested her to assure the Signoria “che nui extimamo tanto la amicitia et intelligentia havimo con essa quanto cosa in quisto mundo” [that we value the friendship and [strategic] intelligence we have with them as much as anything in this world]. When she met the city’s leading citizen, Lorenzo de’ Medici, she was to convey “nostro bono animo verso esso et ala conservatione di suo statu lo quale reputamo proprio per la virtù soa et amore ne porta” [assure him of our goodwill towards him and the preservation of his state which we respect really for his virtue and the love he bears it]. Recent relations between Naples and Florence had been variable, although a triple alliance between Florence, Milan and Naples, first signed in 1467,⁵⁸ had been renewed in 1470, despite

⁵⁵ Falletti, 281; Olivi, 42–43. The party was considerably smaller than that accommodated for the visit of Frederick III and his bride Leonora of Portugal in 1452; see Luigi Lumi and Alessandro Lisini, *L’incontro di Federigo III Imperatore con Eleonora di Portogallo sua novella sposa e il loro soggiorno in Siena* (Siena: Lazzari, 1878); and again in Pietro Parducci, “L’incontro di Federigo III Imperatore con Eleonora di Portogallo,” *Bullettino senese di storia patria*, 8 (1906), 287–379; and Fabrizio Nevola, “‘Lieto e trionfante per la città’: Experiencing a Mid-Fifteenth-Century Imperial Triumph along Siena’s Strada Romana,” *Renaissance Studies* 17 (2003): 581–606.

⁵⁶ Trexler, *Public Life*, 326–27.

⁵⁷ Falletti, 283.

⁵⁸ The seventeen-year-old Lorenzo de’ Medici had visited Naples in the months before the alliance was settled, receiving a warm welcome from Ferrante and the duke of Calabria, and renewing his acquaintance with Ippolita Maria Sforza, whom he had met when he attended her wedding in Milan in 1465. There is little doubt that at that time he would also have met Eleonora, less than two years his

increasing acrimony between Naples and Milan. While in January 1471 Ferrante had signed a secret alliance with Venice, during his visit to Florence in March that same year, Galeazzo Sforza had sought “to dazzle the Florentines with his retinue of more than a thousand persons and hold his younger ally, Lorenzo, more firmly in his camp.”⁵⁹ With relations between Milan and Naples becoming increasingly strained, Ferrante was at pains to use Eleonora’s visit to convince both the Signoria and Lorenzo of his good intentions towards them.

Eleonora described to Carafa the events staged in her honour during her stay in Florence. Her party had watched the Palio as guests of the Medici, after which they had been served “una collatione domestica” [an intimate meal] by Lorenzo and Giuliano de’ Medici, both of whom had “demostrato essereli molto compiazuta la nostra passata dacqui” [shown that our visit here has pleased them greatly].⁶⁰ Filarete wrote that, during her visit to Florence, Eleonora “fu honorata e fattagli le spese del publico con molta magnificenza... Donòssi uno bellissimo bacino col boccale di quelli della Signoria [she was honoured and entertained at public expense with great magnificence ... She was presented by the Signoria with one of its most beautiful bowls together with matching goblets].⁶¹

junior. The cordiality of the relationship between Ferrante and the Medici is apparent in a letter from Ferrante to Lorenzo, dated 2 June 1466: “L’amore che nui portiamo al Magnifico vostro padre, a voi et a vostra casa meritava maiore demonstrazione. Ben ve confortamo a prendere fede in omne cosa possiamo per voi, perché lo simile facimo de vostra casa” [The love we bear towards your father, the Magnificent, towards you and towards your house was worthy of a major demonstration. We sincerely urge you to have every faith in what we can do for you, and we will do the same for your house]; see Pontieri 1963, 238.

⁵⁹ Ilardi, “Towards the *Tragedia d’Italia*,” 108. The relationship between Florence and Naples finally collapsed in November 1474 when Lorenzo signed an agreement with Venice and Milan; see Ilardi, “Towards the *Tragedia d’Italia*,” 118–19, and nn. 96–100.

⁶⁰ Corvisieri 1889, 655.

⁶¹ Filarete and Manfidi, 89. Ercole d’Este had personally notified Lorenzo of the marriage alliance with Naples within days of its confirmation; see ASFi, Mediceo avanti il Principato (hereafter MAP), f. 47, n. 289, letter from Ercole d’Este to Lorenzo de’ Medici, Ferrara, 9 November 1472. He had also invited him to personally attend the wedding celebrations in Ferrara; see ASFi, MAP, f. 47, n. 214, letter from Ercole d’Este to Lorenzo de’ Medici, Ferrara, 4 June 1473. Despite the warmth of these letters, Lorenzo did not attend himself, sending the ambassadors, Luigi Guicciardini and Pandolfo Rucellai, in his place; see Caleffini, 45.

Eleonora's party had remained in Florence for an extra day, so that they would arrive in Ferrara on the expected day, 3 July 1473. Although on the way to Naples Sigismondo d'Este's party had visited Bologna, where they had attended the wedding of Antonio Maria della Mirandola and a step-daughter of Giovanni Bentivoglio, on the return journey, that city was bypassed.⁶² One Bolognese diarist who viewed the return journey of Sigismondo's now much larger company through the countryside of the Romagna, gives some sense of the sheer enormity of the enterprise and its impact on those who viewed its stately progress:

Retornono a Ferrara per Romagna con la spoxa, la quale avea nome Madonna Lianora figliola del re Ferrante de Napoli; et avea la ditta con lei più de 80 muli chareghà de soe robbe. E se disse che l'avea più de 100 veste d'oro e de seda e tante zoglie che quaxi non se porenno numerare" [They are returning to Ferrara with the bride, who is called Lady Eleonora, daughter of King Ferrante of Naples; and that lady had with her 80 mules laden with her possessions. And they said that she had more than 100 gowns of gold and silk and so many jewels that they almost could not be counted].⁶³

Arrival in Ferrara

None of the contemporary accounts of Eleonora's arrival in Ferrara refer to the precise point at which Ercole d'Este met the party which had conveyed his bride from Naples, whether he had gone out beyond the city walls into the *contado*, which was the custom in Naples, and, if so, how far? In his advice to Eleonora on the protocol to be observed at such a meeting, Carafa had confidently predicted that Ercole would leave the city to welcome her, but it is possible that her arrival by water may have made that scenario impossible. Eleonora had boarded a vessel at Argenta, possibly Ercole's elegant

⁶² Caleffini, 40–41.

⁶³ Falletti, 283, n. 21; *Corpus chronicorum bononiensium*, ed. Albano Sobelli, 8 vols., in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, vol. 18, par. I, fasc. 1–30 (Città di Castello: Lapi, 1906–1939), fasc. 26, 438.

personal *bucintoro*, which he had sent to convey her in greater comfort along the River Po to Ferrara.⁶⁴ The anonymous Ferrarese diarist describes the rejoicing which accompanied her progress, “prima da Regenta fina a Ferrara si ballò driè Po per ogni villa” [from Argenta to Ferrara there were festivities in every village along the Po].⁶⁵ The same diarist adds that before she reached Ferrara “ge fu mandato incontra infina a Gaibana doe ganzare in ordine, di zoveni pulidi, vestiti di zornie pulidamente” [two boats were sent as far as Gaibana to meet her, one after the other, <in which there were> elegant young men, dressed in elegant jackets].⁶⁶

None of the contemporary chroniclers describe Eleonora’s first meeting with Ercole when she arrived in Ferrara, although there is the possibility that Caleffini has confused the issue by placing his report of Ercole’s first meeting with his bride after his description her entry into Ferrara. This is what he writes as Eleonora retired to her apartment at the end of that momentous day:

Et per quel dì altro non seguì, ma te dirò bene che, incontra madama, androno prima il signore duca Hercole cum tuti li illustrissimi de sua casa, poi tuti li zentilhomini et cittadini de Ferrara a cavallo cum tuti li infrascripti signori et ambasatori de signori et signorie venuti a noze et inanci madama erano bene centovinti trombeti et circa cento pifari et tamborini de più [Nothing else happened that day, but I can tell you that, to meet Madama, duke Ercole went first with all the most illustrious members of his house, then all the gentlemen and citizens of Ferrara on horseback, with all the lords

⁶⁴ The *bucintoro* [bucentaur] was an elaborately decorated vessel, fitted with a mast and sail, but also with oars. It used for long journeys along the Po and for receiving visitors. The superstructure was fitted out with rooms and it was possible to sleep on board if no alternate accommodation was available. Ercole d’Este had three *bucintori* from 1472; see Tuohy, *Herculean Ferrara*, 154–60. While Tuohy describes the use of carriages by the ladies of the d’Este court for travel through paved city streets, and as platforms for watching hunting, he adds that the poor state of the roads outside the capital meant that travel over any distance was generally on horseback or by water; see Thomas Tuohy, “Carriage at the Court of Duke Ercole I,” in *L’aquila bianca: studi di storia estense per Luciano Chiappini*, ed. Antonio Samaritani and Ranieri Varese (Ferrara: Corbo, 2000), 457–68 (457). An illustration of a later *bucintoro* belonging to Alfonso II d’Este (1559–97), may be seen at the Castello di Mesola, Goro, Provincia di Ferrara.

⁶⁵ *Diario ferrarese*, 88–89.

⁶⁶ *Diario ferrarese*, 89. Gaibana is a village on the Po about five miles from Ferrara. A *ganzara* was type of rowing boat; see Tuohy, *Herculean Ferrara*, 155.

and ambassadors of lords and governments who had come to the wedding, and before Madama there were easily 120 trumpeters and about 100 pipers and more drummers than that].⁶⁷

If this is an account of Ercole's welcome to Eleonora, it seems that the duke had left to wait outside the monastery of San Giorgio (Fig. 5), for her "spoiarse et ornarse dignamente" [change her clothes and adorn herself appropriately], before escorting her through the Porta de Sotto into his city.⁶⁸



Figure 5: Giannantonio da Foligno. Silver reliquary (detail showing St Aurelio and an Olivetan monk, with the city walls, River Po and Monastery of San Giorgio in the background). 1514. Ferrara, Monastery of San Giorgio.

Eleonora's journey, which had taken just over five weeks, would have been physically arduous for Eleonora and her ladies, while her meetings with civic and religious leaders along the way would have been a challenge for a young woman with little experience of the world beyond the borders of the *Regno*. It had been, however, a preparation for her new role as Ercole d'Este's consort, a gradual transition from her

⁶⁷ Caleffini, 44.

⁶⁸ This is in marked contrast to his response, just three months earlier, to the arrival in Ferrara, also by *bucintoro*, of Lucrezia Paleologo, daughter of the ruler of Monferrato, Guglielmo IV Paleologo, and new wife of Rinaldo d'Este, Ercole's step-brother. Sigismondo and Albert d'Este had gone to Porotto in the *bucintoro* to meet her, while Ercole had waited at the Porto di San Paolo on horseback. Then, "vedendola arrivare, subito smontò da cavallo et intrato in la nave dove la era, la visitò cum molti abrazi et molti parlari fra loro; poi' montorno tuti a cavallo; et cusi lei era suso una chinea learda del dicto duca et sue done' [seeing her arrive, he immediately dismounted from his horse and climbed aboard the boat where she was, giving her many hugs and they chatted a lot; then they all mounted their horses, and thus she was on a dappled palfrey belonging to the duke, and so were her ladies]; see *Diario ferrarese*, 86–87; Caleffini, 43.

former life as an Aragonese princess, cloistered within the walls of her father's castle, to a position of responsibility and authority at the court in Ferrara.

The Wedding in Ferrara

Ondedio da Vitale's description of Eleonora's entrance into Ferrara and her triumphal procession through streets lined with admiring townsfolk is one of several eye-witness accounts:

E a hore 21 intròe in Ferrara con grandissimi trionfi, accompagnada da cardinale, vescovi, e preti, notari, prelati e signuri asai, conti, chavalieri, le altre ambasarie, zentilomeni in quantità, inanci per ordine. E drieto havea due duchesse del reame et altre zentile done, grande quantitate a chavalò e in charete trionfale. Dita madama era suxo uno cavalo bianco, vestita de drapo de horo a la napulitana, con li chapili zoxo per le spale, et uno corona preciosissima in capo, sotto una ombrella, o voli dire baldachino, de seda bianco, richo de forniminti. Dal chanto drito era lo cardinale Roverella, da lato sinistro era lo duca Erchule suo spoxo, che per la mano la tenia [At three o'clock in the afternoon, she entered Ferrara in the greatest triumph, accompanied by the cardinal, bishops and priests, notaries, prelates and many nobles, counts, knights, the other ambassadors, numbers of gentlemen, preceding her in order. And behind her she had two duchesses of the kingdom <of Naples> and other noble ladies, a large number on horseback and in triumphal carriages. Madama was on a white horse, <and she was> dressed in cloth of gold in the Neapolitan manner, with her hair out over her shoulders, a most precious crown on her head, under an umbrella, or should we say a *baldachino*, of richly-decorated white silk. On her right side rode Cardinal Roverella, on the left Duke Ercole her bridegroom, who held her by the hand].⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ondedio da Vitale, ff. 5r–6v. The title *Madama* followed Eleonora from Naples to Ferrara. She is almost exclusively referred to as *Madama* in contemporary documents. Bestor suggests that this title is due to Eleonora's royal status, although that has not been substantiated; Bestor, *Kinship*, 222–23. Eleonora is described as riding on Ercole's right, although Carafa had suggested that she should "li passe dala banda manca" [pass to his left side]. This reflects the order in which the couple are portrayed on the medallion which commemorated their marriage and the fact that Eleonora, a princess, outranked her husband, a duke; see Diana Bryant, "'Maestosa e bella, colta e gentile': iconografia certa e supposta di Eleonora d'Aragona, duchessa di Ferrara (1473–93), *Bollettino della Ferrariae Decus* 23 (2006), 183. The normal position for a woman was on the left side of her husband, a position known as the "heraldic left." For the medal struck to commemorate the wedding; see Figure 6 below.

On 23 June 1473, Ercole had issued a proclamation, granting local citizens permission to lodge visitors in their houses and to provide food and shelter for them and their horses free of tax, so that large crowds would visit Ferrara for the wedding and provide a worthy audience for the “trionfi inestimabili facti in dito dì per questa madama Lienora” [inestimable triumphs performed on that day for Madama Eleonora],⁷⁰ and that:

His happy wedding would be honored and magnified and exalted by means of the concourse and multiplication of peoples in this, his glorious city of Ferrara, to see and understand the magnificent and great things, and triumphs and honors that will be done for the honor, glory, prestige and exaltation of the Very Illustrious Madona Eleonora, his consort, and for the contentment and jubilation of all the princes, lords and barons who will be in the *comitiva* of Her Ladyship.⁷¹

To entertain the expected crowds, as well as to impress the visiting dignitaries, at seven points along Eleonora’s route, “a similitudine de li septe pianeti” [to resemble the seven planets],⁷² were stationed “carri triumphali ornati et digni, carichi de puti vestiti ornatamente che ballavano, cantavano et sonavano” [ornate and dignified triumphal carts, full of splendidly dressed young children who danced, sang, and played instruments] as Eleonora passed by.⁷³ The diarist concludes “E fu una bella cosa, quelli septe pianeti, da vedere” [It was a wonderful thing to see those seven planets].⁷⁴

The description of Eleonora’s entrance into Ferrara as, “con grandissimi trionfi” [with the greatest triumph], recalls the triumphal processions through the streets of ancient Rome accorded to returning military commanders by the Senate to honour their military successes. The triumphal wedding procession through the streets of Ferrara to the seats of both civic and ecclesiastical power, the palace and the cathedral, in recalling

⁷⁰ Ondedio da Vitale, f. 6r.

⁷¹ Bestor, *Kinship*, 215.

⁷² Diario ferrarese, 89.

⁷³ Caleffini, 43. This was apparently a reference to Ercole’s interest in astrology; see Falletti, 285, n. 24.

⁷⁴ Diario ferrarese, 89.

those ancient triumphs, reflects the popularity of humanist culture at the Italian courts and the trend for rulers to look to classical models to confirm their own legitimacy.⁷⁵ One more expression of this cultural phenomenon was the revival of the classical *epithalamium*, or wedding oration, by which humanist orators “performed a central role as entertainers and publicists” with their delivery of “panegyrics praising both the institution of marriage and those being married.”⁷⁶

Caleffini describes the marriage ceremony, which took place the following day Sunday 4 July, in the *Sala grande* of Ercole’s palace, when the wedding oration was delivered by Ercole’s physician, Ieronimo da Castello.⁷⁷ Then, announced by trumpeters and pipers, the bride and groom and their supporters crossed the piazza to the cathedral, where the marriage was blessed at a solemn High Mass celebrated by Bartolomeo Roverella, the cardinal of Ravenna and papal legate in the Marches. At the banquet which followed, fifty-six courses were served and, after the dancing, one hundred silver platters of sweetmeats were carried out by one hundred pages.⁷⁸ Caleffini was fascinated by Eleonora’s exoticism and by her regal manner: “balando Madama Sua Signoria havea li capelli negri, secondo che se usa a Napoli, zoxo per le spale et la corona in testa a modo de regina” [when she danced Her Ladyship Madama wore her black hair loose

⁷⁵ Brucia Witthoft, “Marriage Rituals and Marriage Chests in Quattrocento Florence,” *Artibus et Historiae*, 3 (1982): 43–59 (49).

⁷⁶ Anthony F. D’Elia, *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 35.

⁷⁷ Caleffini, 51. The diarist, Antighini, writes: “Gerolamo da Castello medigo fe’ una oratione e fe’ spoxada et sono benedi el ducha e la duchessa incoronda in lo veschovo de Feraria cum grande trionfi dall gardenale Roverela”; see Giuliano Antighini, *Cronaca 1384–1504*, Ferrara, Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea, MS Classe I, 757. Antighini’s diary can only be consulted in a much deteriorated microfilm copy. It is a composite collection of the diarist’s observations of public events and the private events of the Antighini family. Folin describes Giuliano Antighini: “rimase sempre un uomo di contado, legatissimo alla villa natale, dove continuava ad abitare per gran parte dell’anno e dove fece nascere e battezzare tutti i propri figli” [he always remained a country man, very closely connected to the country house where he continued to live most of the year and where his children were born and baptised]; see Folin, “Le cronache a Ferrara,” 464.

⁷⁸ For a list of the vast quantities of ingredients needed for this banquet and the equipment and utensils it required, see Caleffini, 48–51.

over her shoulders, as they do in Naples, a crown on her head like a queen].⁷⁹

Caleffini alone makes any reference to the consummation of the marriage:

“Et in quella sira il signore cum la prefata sua dona se acompagnorno et consumorno il matrimonio” [And that evening His Lordship and his lady went together and consummated the marriage]. It is to be noted that the women named by Caleffini as *piombole* [bridesmaids]⁸⁰ were not Eleonora’s own ladies, but two of Ercole’s close relatives: Lucrezia di Monferrato, the wife of Ercole’s half-brother, Rinaldo d’Este, and Bianca della Mirandola, Ercole’s half-sister and the wife of Galeotto Pico della Mirandola. While both were ladies with impeccable credentials, for Eleonora, they were complete strangers. It is probable that their presence was required, as agents of the Estense court, to see that all went to plan on the wedding night, that the union was consummated and that Eleonora was indeed a virgin, not an inconsiderable question given the controversy surrounding her former marriage.

An enduring memento: Sperando’s medallion

The marriage is thought to have been the occasion for the striking of a series of medallions picturing the ducal couple. On one such medallion by Sperandio of Mantua, the couple are shown facing each other, overseen by a winged cherub, a symbol of the divine blessing on the marriage.⁸¹ (Fig. 6) Exceptionally, Eleonora is on the left, the side usually reserved for men, a reference to her superior rank.

⁷⁹ Caleffini, 52.

⁸⁰ Caleffini, 52.

⁸¹ Bryant, “‘Maestosa e bella, colta e gentile’,” 183. This medallion, now in the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C., is cast in lead, very heavy and with a plain reverse. I am indebted to Dr Eleonora Luciano, the Assistant Curator of Sculpture, for allowing me to examine this precious object, and for discussing her findings.

Dr Luciano is the co-author of the forth-coming catalogue of the Gallery’s Renaissance medals.



Figure 6: Sperandio (c.1431-1504?), Ercole I d'Este and Eleonora d'Aragona, probably 1473. Lead. Washington, National Gallery of Art, Samuel H. Kress Collection 1957.14.709.

Woods-Marsden refers to this orientation of women in portraits as the heraldic sinister, because it was on God's left hand. To indicate his innate superiority, the husband would then be placed on the superior heraldic dexter, or God's right hand.⁸² Eleonora's position as a princess of the royal house of Aragon clearly out-ranked that of Ercole, a mere duke and a comparatively recent title at that, having been conferred on Borso d'Este by Paul II only two years earlier. The issuing of the medallion may be seen as an indication of Ercole's keen awareness that his marriage to a royal princess was a useful vehicle for his own self-promotion. Corradini describes the propagandist intent of the portrait medal at humanist courts and writes that Ercole was the first of his family to use a portrait of his wife for that purpose.⁸³

Guests at the wedding: the Gonzaga of Mantua

A group of letters in the Archivio di Stato in Mantova suggests that weddings have long been a potential cause for dispute between families and near neighbours. Relations

⁸² Woods-Marsden, "Portrait," 69.

⁸³ Corradini, 30.

had been strained between the Gonzaga court and Ercole after the duke banished his nephew, Niccolò di Leonello, to his mother's court in Mantova in the reprisals which followed Ercole's contested succession in August 1471.⁸⁴ A letter from Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene, the secretary of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, to Ludovico Gonzaga, from Ferrara on 25 May 1473, describing the warm welcome that they had received from Ercole and his mother, suggests that attempts were being made to heal the rift.⁸⁵

Letters between Barbara of Brandenburg and the young cardinal, however, reveal that the family had been having difficulty deciding what to do about Ercole's invitation to his wedding and who, if anyone, should be sent. Writing to his mother also on 25 May 1473, Francesco Gonzaga reported that he had been approached by Giacomo Trotti, who at that time was one of Ercole's closest advisors. Trotti "de queste noze me dimandoè chi se mandaria ad esse per Vostra Signoria" [asked me about this wedding <and> who would be sent on Your Ladyship's behalf], and that he had had to plead ignorance of the matter.⁸⁶ Ercole himself wrote to Barbara of Brandenburg on 6 June 1473, assuring her that it would give him much pleasure if she personally came to Ferrara "ad honorare queste nostre noze" [to honour our marriage]. However, he needed to know the size of her party, and as soon as possible, "acioché meglio del canto nostro si possa fare provisione de honorarla" [so that, for our part, we can better make provision to do you honour].⁸⁷ A letter, from Arrivabene to a man only referred to as "Philippo," suggests that Ercole was most anxious to extend his hospitality to Cardinal Gonzaga:

havendoni scritto questa sera l'altra mia da la Torre de la Fossa nui ne aviassemo suso cum intentione de passare Ferrara do o tre miglia e dormire in bucintoro, ma presso a la

⁸⁴ Caleffini, 10–11.

⁸⁵ ASMa, Carteggio degli inviati e diversi, busta 1228, letter from Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene to Ludovico Gonzaga, Ferrara, 25 May 1473

⁸⁶ ASMa, Carteggio degli inviati e diversi, busta 1228, letter from Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga to his mother, Barbara of Brandenburg, Ferrara, 25 May 1473.

⁸⁷ ASMa, Carteggio Gonzaga, Lettere degli Estensi ai Signori di Mantova, busta 1182, letter from Ercole d'Este to Barbara of Brandenburg, Ferrara, 6 June 1473.

torre se ce fece al'incontro d. Iacomo Trotto, mandato da la Eccellenza de questo Signore per invitarce a dormire(?) qui [having written tonight in my other letter from Torre della Fossa that we were going down river with the intention of passing within two or three miles of Ferrara and sleeping in the *bucintoro*, we were however met by Lord Giacomo Trotti, who had been sent by His Excellency, the *Signore* of this place, to invite us to sleep here].⁸⁸

Antigini reports the presence at the marriage celebrations of the Mantuan ambassador, and he may well be the author of a letter to Barbara of Brandenburg, dated 7 July 1473, which offers a view of the wedding festivities slightly different from that of the Ferrarese diarists.⁸⁹ This letter even contains new information which suggests that Ercole went only as far as the monastery to meet his bride and that he was on horseback:

Sabato a li 21 ora zonzesimo a Ferara e trovasimo quello prefato Signor essere montato a cavallo e andato incontro a la prefata duchessa insino a lo porto di Santo Zorzo e ivi l'aspetò per spazio de una ora [On Saturday, at three o'clock in the afternoon, we reached Ferrara and found that His Lordship had mounted and gone as far as the port of San Giorgio to meet the duchess, and he waited there for an hour]

The writer also gives a slightly different description of Eleonora's appearance on that day:

avia in testa una palmeta di vello a bocholato bianco tempestato di belle perle e da onj lato de dicto foza duj filli de perle grosse e belle come una corona d'oro in testa molto richa di rubinj, diamanti, perle e avea li capilli alongo le spalle li qualli capilli sono di colore castagniollo e avea al collo uno vezo di belle perle grosse [she had on her head a little veil of white lace, studded with lovely pearls and on each side of it were two strands of large and beautiful pearls like a golden crown on her head, rich with rubies, diamonds and pearls, and she had her hair loose on her shoulders and it was brown in colour, and she had around her neck a necklace of beautiful big pearls].

⁸⁸ASMa, Carteggio Gonzaga, Carteggio degli inviati e diversi, Ferrara, busta 1228, Instructions from Arrivabene to Filippo, 22 June 1473.

⁸⁹ASMa, Carteggio Gonzaga, Carteggio degli inviati e diversi, Ferrara, busta 1228, letter from an unidentified correspondent to Barbara of Brandenburg, Ferrara, 7 July 1473, damaged. This letter is cited in Alessandro Luzio, "Isabella d'Este e Francesco Gonzaga promessi sposi," *Archivio storico Lombardo*, 9 (1908): 34–69 (34–35).

Barbara's correspondent also reports: "Io ò adempito a quanto quello me comisse di visitatione e presenti li qualli sono stati ricevuti amorevolle e umanamente" [I did what you required me to do in relation the visit and the gifts which were received affectionately and politely].

One of these gifts is the subject of what appears to be Eleonora's earliest extant letter.⁹⁰ Also conserved in the Mantua Archive, it is a thank-you note addressed to Barbara of Brandenburg and dictated by the young duchess on 29 July 1473.⁹¹ Eleonora acknowledged Barbara's gift of a "pezza del brocato d'oro...uno dono molto digno et excelente" [piece of gold brocade ... a most worthy and excellent gift]. Ignoring the fact that the Gonzagas had not personally attended the wedding, Eleonora's letter is charming and refined. While her protestations of gratitude are clearly excessive, she appears to be sincere in her wish to have the friendship of the older woman. At the age of fifty-one and as the mother of ten children, five of them daughters, Barbara could be expected by Eleonora to be a source of motherly advice as she familiarised herself with the expectations of Ercole and his court. Swain suggests that she was a very good role model for Eleonora.⁹²

In expressing her thanks for the wedding gift, the young bride expressed her hope that:

⁹⁰ ASMa, Archivio Gonzaga, lettere degli Estensi ai Signori di Mantova, busta 1182, letter from Eleonora d'Aragona to Babara of Brandenburg, Ferrara, 29 July 1473.

⁹¹ Barbara of Brandenburg (1422–81) had married Ludovico Gonzaga at the age of 11 and moved from Northern Germany to Mantua. She had been educated with the Gonzaga children at the Scuola Giocosa, the humanist school of Vittorino da Feltre. Antenhofer writes: "Barbara stands out as a remarkably strong, highly cultivated Renaissance woman [...] at the centre of an extensive network of correspondence. She wrote daily to her husband, relating everything she had handled and decided, and to her children, her relatives, advisors and most other members of the courtly *familia*. Furthermore she maintained a widespread diplomatic correspondence, for instance with the Visconti of Milan, the Curia in Rome, and German relatives and high nobles"; see Antenhofer, 104–06.

⁹² Swain draws parallels between Barbara's marriage to Ludovico Gonzaga and those of Bianca Maria Visconti and Francesco Sforza and Eleonora and Ercole, writing that "these letters enable us to dip below the surface of a 'good' marriage, to discover some of the realities of matrimonial give-and-take"; see Swain, 177.

per esserni dato di buono animo et de perfecto core, come certamente tenemo, nui l'habbiamo altresì acceptato et acceptamo cum allegro core, tenendolo per pigno de amore e per fondamento di nostra fraterna benivolentia quale continuamenta si habbia crescere e aumentare [since it is given with good intention and a perfect heart, as we surely believe, in like manner we have accepted it and continue to accept it with a happy heart, keeping it as a pledge of love and as the foundation of our sisterly goodwill which must continually grow and increase].

She reveals that Barbara had asked her for “dele cose del canto del Reame” [some things from the *Regno*], a thoughtful move on Barbara’s part with its suggestion that a mutually-advantageous relationship is going to continue between them. Barbara had particularly asked Eleonora for “quelle gentilezze si usano dillà, lavorate ad aguchia” [those delicate things which are used there, worked by hand], suggesting that, “per haverne copia per exempio” [they may be a pattern to be copied].⁹³ Barbara’s request had clearly delighted Eleonora and she expressed the hope that “bene serà uno preambulo e principio di domesticheza fra nui” [it may well be an introduction and beginning of familiarity between us]. Barbara’s articulated preference for the refined needlework of Naples, even if it were merely flattery, had clearly struck a chord with Eleonora, still hungry for references to her childhood home in those early days of her marriage. She would therefore present Barbara with “una velliera, tre camise, e uno manto lavorato in Valentia per parte e parte a Napuli, et alchun altre gentil cose” [a veil, three shifts, and a cloak partly made in Valencia, partly in Naples, and several other refined things], presumably from her own possessions.

This letter reveals Eleonora to be both gracious in her acceptance of the Gonzaga’s wedding gift and anxious to initiate friendship with her near-neighbour in Mantova. She is still the enthusiastic and inexperienced young woman who had left

⁹³ Swain describes a similar relationship between Barbara of Brandenburg and Bianca Maria Sforza in which they exchanged gifts “of practical value – dress fabrics and patterns, the loan of a tailor, even three bottles of hair bleach guaranteed to please the husband”; see Swain, 180–81.

Naples little more than two months earlier, although it may be argued that it was those very qualities that would endear her to Ercole, enabling their relationship to move beyond its political basis and to become a warm and loving partnership.

Letters from Home

This chapter will end with two letters to Eleonora from Naples which reveal that she was still very much in the thoughts of her family. The first of these is from Ferrante, who writes in his own hand in a style very like that of his daughter. Although the year is omitted from the date, it is clearly the king's first communication with Eleonora since her arrival in Ferrara.⁹⁴

Ferrante's tone was melancholy. He was clearly missing his lovely young daughter, addressing her affectionately as "Leonor mia molto cara et amata filla" [Eleonora, my very dear and much loved daughter]. Having first reassured that he and the rest of her family were all well, although, "son stato hun poco indisposto de dolla de testa" [I've been a little unwell with a headache]. He had heard from others that she was "sana alegre et contenta" [healthy, happy and contented], but he would like to hear that from her "de tua mano" [in your own hand], as such a letters "daranno consolatione al mio animo" [will put my mind at rest], even though "in questo principio me siano cifre che una che me nde mandaste me la ave' a far lezere a miser Pasquale" [at this early stage they are like cypher to me, so that I have had to get one of the letters which you sent me read to me by Misser Pasquale]. He suggested that this might always be a problem for him: "se per l'avenir me scriveray sì spesso come ay fatto per lo passato al respondere averò poco affanno et la praticcha non me farà maestro in saperli legere" [if in the future you write to me as often as you have done in the past, I will have little

⁹⁴ ASMo, Cancelleria estense, Estero, Carteggio dei Principi e Signorie, Naples-Sicily, busta 1, autograph letter from Ferrante I of Naples to Eleonora d'Aragona, 29 July [1473].

difficulty replying <but> practice will not make me an expert at reading them]. Eleonora had apparently been writing frequently to her family in Naples, suggesting either that she was homesick or that she was simply a thoughtful daughter. Ferrante expressed his concern that Ercole “per mio respecto et tua virtute te haverà per raccomandata” [will take good care of you because of his respect for me and your own excellent qualities], and the hope that Ercole might sometimes include him in his letter-writing, “per mio amore” [for love of me]. Ferrante closed his affectionate little letter on a parochial note, “non so como te portarà quello agro che sento hè diferente de questo” [I don’t know how you will cope with the countryside there which I hear is different from ours here]. This intensely personal letter from a father to his much loved daughter highlights the issues of loss and regret that were implicit in such dynastic marriages as fathers sacrificed daughters, who were often no more than children, on the altar of political expediency.

A second letter written to Eleonora soon after her arrival in Ferrara was from her elder brother, Alfonso. Conserved in the Archivio di Stato in Modena, it had been given a date in 1477, although, since Alfonso refers to the presence in Naples of their sister, Beatrice, who left as the bride of Matthias Corvinus in September 1476, it must have been written before that date. Because of textual references discussed below, it has been assigned the date 27 August 1473.⁹⁵ Alfonso suggested that Eleonora had responded positively to some advice had given her:

Ho havuto el maior piacere del mundo intendere per vostra lettera che comenzate ad accettare <che> li consiglie mei esser veri et boni et ho speranza che ogne di vene recordarite meglio et meterite in effecto per lo tempo perduto [It’s given me the greatest pleasure in the world to learn from your letter that you are beginning to accept that my advice is true and good and I hope that every day you will remember it well and make up for lost time].

⁹⁵ ASMo, Estero, Principi e Signorie, Naples–Sicily, busta 2, autograph letter from Alfonso, duke of Calabria to Eleonora d’Aragona, Sarno, 27 [August/September 1473?]

That that advice had been about her relationship, possibly sexual, with Ercole, was confirmed by his next phrase, “resto assai satisfacto secundo intendo de onni homo con quanto piacere et allegrecza state con lo Signor duca vostro” [I am most satisfied to hear from everyone what pleasure and joy you are finding with your duke]. He was happy that “ve andate donando solaczo per quissi palaczi ad cacza” [you are going to have some fun in those hunting lodges], which could be a reference to the week that Ercole and Eleonora spent at their summer palace of Belriguardo in early September with the Burgundian ambassador, who had not been able to attend their wedding.⁹⁶ Then, expressing what they all were hoping: “Dio ve lo facze havere longo tempo insieme et atendite hormai afar qualche figliolo” [May God grant you a long time together and you can now look to making a son or two].

Even after her marriage to a much older man, Alfonso is still playing the older, more experienced brother with Eleonora. While some of his suggestions appear to be somewhat inappropriate, he is clearly a man’s man who doesn’t mince his words. He is also realistic about the fact that the success or failure of his sister’s marriage depends on her ability to produce a male heir, and the sooner the better.

With Eleonora safely married to her duke, in the following chapter the focus will be on the first four years of the marriage. It was a period of consolidation, both personal and political, for the couple, and fortunately it was blessed with comparative peace on the peninsula. Ferrara, however, was not free from dramatic events, two of which stand out: Ercole’s banishment of his dashing half-brother, Alberto, to Naples, and the attempted coup d’état of Niccolò di Leonello. Ercole’s relationship with Ferrante was

⁹⁶ Caleffini records the arrival in Ferrara on 27 August 1473 of the duke of Burgundy’s ambassador, who had been unable to attend the wedding in July. After entertaining him in Ferrara, on 28 August, Ercole “andò in villa a Belriguardo cum dicto ambasatore et cum madama Leonora sua consorte percarissima a piacere, dove li steno a occellare per tuto sete di de settembre 1473” [went to his villa at Belriguardo to relax with that ambassador and Madama his dearest wife, and they stayed there and occupied themselves with falconry] for all of the first seven days of September 1473]; see Caleffini, 47. Belriguardo was Ercole’s favourite summer villa and hunting estate.

never straightforward in this period, so that although they had both joined competing alliances in 1474, in November 1475, Ferrante conferred on his son-in-law the rights and privileges of the Aragonese Order of the Ermine. For Eleonora, it was a period in which she would consolidate her position as Ercole's consort, establishing her own household, giving birth to three children, including the all-important heir, creating her own leadership style with the help of her old mentor, Diomedes Carafa, and struggling to reconcile her increasingly problematic relationship with Naples with her loyalty to her husband and his state.