

Chapter 4

Procreation: The Early Years of the Marriage

The first years of her marriage to Ercole d'Este were a period of transition and adaptation for Eleonora: transition from her life as a relatively minor member of her father's court in Naples, surrounded by a loving extended family and guided by a group of skilled and devoted mentors of the calibre of Diomedes Carafa, and adaptation to life at a "foreign" court as the wife of a ruler almost twice her age, with the responsibilities which that position entailed, adaptation to new cultural traditions, climate and diet, and to doing without many of the men and women who had supported her as she grew to young womanhood. This chapter will follow Eleonora through the more significant events of the first four years of her marriage, including the birth to three children, two daughters and finally the longed-for son, and her successful defence of them from a violent coup d'état attempt by Niccolò di Leonello. Her contacts with Naples were limited to letters, of which very few survive in the *Archivio di Stato* in Modena, and to the visits of members of her family, her younger brother, Federigo, and sister, Beatrice, both passing through Ferrara en route to further destinations, and of dignitaries, such as Diomedes Carafa's son, Giovanni Tommaso, who conveyed Ferrante's Order of the Ermine to Ercole in late 1475. Ercole honoured his wife by accommodating these visitors and entertaining their parties with lavish banquets, tournaments and days of hunting at both his city and country estates. At some stage in these early years, Eleonora received from Diomedes Carafa his gift of a treatise on the duties of a good ruler, *I doveri del principe*, a codification of his long education of her in the Neapolitan

court, a preparation that both shaped and reflected her style of government and her strong sense of duty to her husband's subjects.

For Ercole, the years after Eleonora's arrival in Ferrara were a time for consolidation, for confirming his legitimacy as ruler of Ferrara and for removing all opposition to his authority. An early expression of the duke's determination to dominate the political scene in Ferrara was his decision to consign his own half-brother, the popular and elegant Alberto d'Este, to a long exile in Naples and to confiscate his property. Two years later, Ercole ordered the execution of his kinsman, Niccolò di Leonello, in retaliation for his violent but unsuccessful coup attempt. In this chapter, I will re-examine letters between Diomede Carafa and Ercole preserved in the Modena Archive to trace the gradual deterioration of Ercole's relationship with his father-in-law over their divergent foreign policies.

As no letters between Ercole and Eleonora survive from this period, it is difficult to evaluate her role in the process of Ercole's consolidation and the development of their relationship, although the regular arrival of babies indicates that there was continued intimacy. It was a time of comparative peace and the couple were rarely apart, although Eleonora did make a two-week state visit to Venice during *Carnevale* in 1476.¹ The records of a number of chroniclers make it possible to follow the couple through their daily round of duties, receptions and court entertainments, but it was only when their lives were threatened by Niccolò di Leonello's violent attack that the strength of the bond between them was revealed, and then only through the diarist's pen.

¹ Zambotti, 5.

Eleonora's household in Ferrara

When Eleonora arrived in Ferrarain 1473 to begin her life as Ercole's consort she appears to have escaped the indignity of being stripped bare of all the links to her past. While other royal brides were "quickly transformed from being a representative of foreign interests to a symbol of local prestige," and forced to assume the clothing, diet and language of the new court and to see the attendants, male and female, who had accompanied her thus far being sent home and replaced by those chosen by her husband, Eleonora continued to enjoy her identity as daughter of the king of Naples.²

Whether it was because of her superior status as a royal princess, or her relative maturity, or Diomede Carafa's representations, Ercole clearly greeted her with good will and an intention to make her happy in her new home. In the portrait gallery of the *Genealogia dei principi d'Este*, compiled c. 1474–79 and offering one of the earliest pictorial representations as duchess of Ferrara, Eleonora is wearing the clothes which are reminiscent of those that she wore for her entry into the city (Fig. 8).³ The great jewel on her breast is a "balasso grande" like the one noted by Ercole's brothers when they first saw her, while the crown on her head acknowledges her royal rank as well as her role as duchess of Ferrara. To a duchy that was founded on the most tenuous claims to legitimacy Eleonora was an enormous asset.

² Welch, "Women as Patrons," 21. The Sforza court in Milan was particularly insistent that foreign brides quickly divest themselves of the outward signs of their previous nationalities; see Lubkin, 57. Boccaccio's Griselda is an emblematic example (*Decameron* X, 10), but the practice was still observed at the French court in the eighteenth century, for example in the stripping of the Hapsburg princess, Marie Antoinette, when she crossed the border between Austria and France in May 1770 as the bride of Louis XVI; see Madame Campan, *Memoirs of the Court of Marie Antoinette, Queen of France: being the historic memoirs of Madame Campan, First Lady in Waiting to the Queen*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3891/3891-h/3891-h.htm#book1>, accessed 20 August 2011.

³ The manuscript consists of two fragments, one in Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, MS Ita. 720 (formerly α .L.5.16), the other in Rome, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Vittorio Emanuele 293. For a facsimile of the whole and commentary, see *Genealogia dei Principe d'Este*, ed. Ernesto Milano and Mauro Bini, 2 vols. (Modena: Il Bulino, 1996).



Figure 7. Portrait of Eleonora d'Aragona, from the *Genealogia dei Principi d'Este* (c. 1474–9). Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, MS Ita. 720 (formerly α .L.5.16).

There is no mention of how many of Eleonora's Neapolitan attendants of either sex remained with her in Ferrara, although the reports in contemporary diaries of the marriages of Neapolitan ladies described as “donzella de madama duchessa Eleonora” [lady-in-waiting of Madama Duchess Eleonora], supports Ondedio da Vitale's later description of her household:

Questa tale dona e madona certo era savia nel governo suo et portavase bene con cugnati e cuginate e con nepute, madrinale e bastardi, piccoli e grandi talli e quali de le donzele ferarese ne tenia con lei, e in puocho tempo le maritava e donavali del suo in docta. Al governo de la persona sua de done erano tute napulitane, niuna ferarexe, non erano salvo che per cumpagne che pure ne havea alcune, ma puoche. Le done che con lei condusse da Napuli che fusseno da marito, tuto le maridò bene e in ferrarixi; in fino ale schiave sue diè marito et alozole bene. De homini al suo governo tuti erano ferrarixi. [This lady and mistress governed her household wisely and conducted herself well with her brothers – and sisters-in-law and with her nephews, both legitimate and bastard, great and small, just as she did with the Ferrarese ladies-in-waiting that she kept with her, and in a short space of time she found them husbands and gave them dowries from her own purse. Her personal maids were all Neapolitan; none of them were Ferrarese, except for maids of honour, for she had some but not many. The ladies that she brought from Naples who were marriageable she married them all well and to Ferrarese men. Right down to her

slaves, she married them and set them up. All the men in her household were Ferrarese.]⁴

There had been no long-term female presence at the court in Ferrara since the departure of Niccolò III's widow, Ercole's mother, Ricciarda da Saluzzo, in 1441.⁵ Although Niccolò's successor, Leonello, had married twice, his first wife, Margherita Gonzaga, had died before he took power in 1441, while his second wife, Maria d'Aragona, lived only five years after arriving in Ferrara. Borso d'Este, who ruled for twenty years, from 1450 to 1471, was a confirmed bachelor, surrounding himself with a decidedly all-male court.⁶ The arrival of Eleonora at the Estense court in July 1473 was therefore the signal for "a return to a form of social normality," creating the need for a female court, one which would run in tandem with that already established by the duke, but needing its own staff and accommodation that was appropriate for the duchess and any children she might produce.⁷

In June 1472, Ercole had welcomed his mother back from Saluzzo, where she had lived in self-imposed exile for almost thirty years in protest against Leonello d'Este's assumption of power on the death of Niccolò III.⁸ Ondedio da Vitale gives a delightfully honest description of the redoubtable old lady's return to Ferrara:

Per la quale venuta fu facta grande alegreze con fuogi, soni de campane e trombe. Questa dona era de età de ani 60, piccola dona magra, lo naxo aquiline, uno fuoza in testa cornuta

⁴ Ondedio, *Cronaca*, f. 18v. Instances of these unions may be found scattered through the diaries. The presence of "madama Diana da Napoli donzella de madama duchessa Eleonora," with her husband, Antonio Ludovico di Cumani da Ferrara, is recorded at a court wedding in May 1478; see Caleffini, 291. Zambotti writes that Eleonora, with all her court, accompanied "madona Silvia da Napuli, a cavalo con li trombetti, a marito, che hè Zoanne Francesco dal Canale jureconsulto ferrarexe"; see Zambotti, 69. Pardi comments that Silvia was a lady-in-waiting who had accompanied Eleonora from Naples, and that several of these ladies had married professors from the Studio; see Zambotti, 69, n.18.

⁵ Werner Gundersheimer, "Women, Learning, and Power: Eleonora of Aragon and the Court of Ferrara," in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York: New York University Press, 1980), 43–65 (44).

⁶ The suggestion that Borso d'Este was homosexual is discussed by Lewis Lockwood in his *Music in Renaissance Ferrara 1400-1505: the Creation of a Musical Centre in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 89 and n. 10, and by Werner Gundersheimer in his "Clarity and Ambiguity in Renaissance Gesture: the Case of Borso d'Este," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 23 (1993): 1–18 (14–16).

⁷ Gundersheimer, "Women, Learning, and Power," 44.

⁸ Caleffini, 22–23.

grande, vestita de cupo, la coda lunga, e facevasela portare a una donzella ma non se inapacava de cossa alcuno. [There was great rejoicing at her arrival with bonfires and the sounds of bells and trumpets. She was a thin little lady of sixty, with an aquiline nose, a large horned headdress on her head, dressed in black, with a long train which she had carried by a lady-in-waiting, but she was incapable of nothing.]⁹

Diomede Carafa's advice to Eleonora's sister, Beatrice, reveals that she too would be permitted to keep her Neapolitan ladies with her when she went to her husband's court in Hungary. Carafa admonishes the young queen: "Agendae eidem abs te gratiae sunt, quod humanissime indulserit te posse uti ministerio italicarum ancillarum, praesertim earum, quae apud te bonam partem aetatis consumpserunt" [You must thank your husband because he most kindly allowed you to avail yourself of the services of your Italian ladies, especially those who have spent most of their lives with you].¹⁰ Despite the comforting presence of her Neapolitan ladies, however, Beatrice's transition to Matthias Corvinus's court in Buda would prove to be less harmonious than Eleonora's.¹¹

In line with the suggestion that it was his mother who had convinced Ercole to quickly choose a wife and provide himself with a legitimate heir, Ricciarda was at the foot of Ercole's newly-constructed staircase in the courtyard of the Palazzo di Corte

⁹ Ondedio, *Cronaca*, f. 5v. The "fuoza (*foggia*) in testa cornuta" refers to "a female style of headdress, part of a woman's *acconciatura*, which had horn shapes on both sides of the head, then draped with a thin gauze veil. This mid fifteenth-century fashion imported from France and Flanders was ridiculed by moralists such as Bernardino da Siena"; see Carol Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Fashion, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 306. Ricciarda's choice of headdress reflects her origins in Piedmont and her family's connections with France.

¹⁰ Carafa, "De Institutione Vivendi" ("Memoriale a la Serenissima Regina de Ungaria"), in his *Memoriali*, 232 and 234. The passage is from the Latin translation of Carafa's original Italian by Colantonio Lentulo, English translation by David Fairservice.

¹¹ Berzeviczy writes that Beatrice "rimase sempre straniera, più tardi fu odiata [...]. La sua diffidenza verso gli ungheresi, la smisurata protezione di cui circondava i suoi parenti ed i suoi connazionali, la misura eccessiva in cui questi godevano i favori della corte [...] dovevano necessariamente destare sentimenti ostili negli popolo" [always remained a foreigner, later she was hated [...] her mistrust of the Hungarians, the limitless protection with which she surrounded her relatives and her compatriots, the excessive degree to which these people enjoyed the favours of the court [...] had by necessity to inspire feelings of hostility in the people]; see Albert Berzeviczy, "Rapporti storici fra Napoli e l'Ungheria nell'epoca degli Aragonesi (1442-1501)," *Atti della Accademia Pontaniana di Napoli* 58 (1928): 180-202 (194).

to welcome her new daughter-in-law to Ferrara on 3 July 1473.¹² Caleffini writes that, “tolse la prefata madama Leonora sua nora et condussella suso per la scala nel palazzo insino in camara sua dove la arivò stracha” [she took Madama Leonora, her daughter-in-law, by the hand and led her up the staircase and into the palace to her chamber, where she arrived exhausted].¹³

Major public works had been undertaken to receive the bride. Shortly after the proclamation of his betrothal to Eleonora in November 1472, Ercole had begun to refurbish the public centre of Ferrara, paving of the main piazza between the Palazzo di Corte and the Duomo, and building a gallery along the south side of the Duomo for the viewing of public spectacles (Fig. 8).

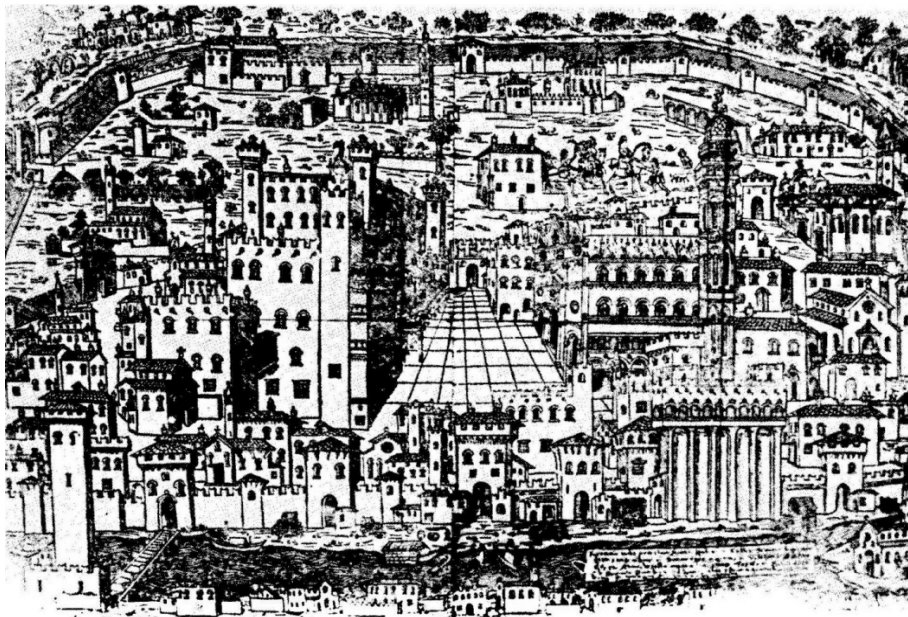


Figure 8: An anonymous woodcut of Ferrara in 1499, with the city walls and the Porta San Paolo in the foreground and the Palazzo di Corte and Duomo (with its viewing gallery) on either side of the paved main Piazza. In the background are the beginnings of the New Addition which Ercole began in 1494 (Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, MS Ita.429 (formerly α H.5.3).

¹² See above, Chapter 2, 99, n. 32.

¹³ Caleffini, 44. In the reign of Ercole I, the Palazzo di Corte was the ducal residence in Ferrara, situated on the main square opposite the Duomo. It was connected to the defensive Castello Vecchio by a raised passage, the Via Coperta, which was rebuilt by Ercole soon after his succession in 1471; see Tuohy, 60.

A series of marble balconies, called the “pozòli de’ Banchieri,” also intended for the viewing of public spectacles, were added to the Torre di Rigobello on the front of the Palazzo di Corte and embellished with marble heads of Roman emperors.¹⁴ On 27 March 1473, work had commenced on renovations to the main courtyard of Palazzo di Corte, which was paved and supplied with a covered marble staircase giving access to the apartments on the first floor of the *palazzo*. Internal work included the re-fashioning of the existing *Sala Grande* [Great Hall] in anticipation of the wedding celebrations and future ceremonial occasions.¹⁵

While there is no record of any internal renovations to the Palazzo di Corte in preparation for Eleonora’s arrival, the configuration of earlier female court accommodation has been reconstructed by Folin. He writes that Ricciarda da Saluzzo had occupied a suite of ten rooms in the Torre di Rigobello at the front of the palace, overlooking the main piazza. These rooms had consisted of “una sala, una caminata, la sua stanza da letto [...] e alcune camere per le figlie bastarde del marchese e le lavandare di corte” [a living room, a corridor, her bedroom [...] and several bedrooms for the natural daughters of the Marquis and the court laundresses].¹⁶ Her daughter-in-law, Margherita Gonzaga, had occupied an adjacent apartment which comprised her own bedroom, rooms for the servants, the ladies-in-waiting and “le dame di compagnia” [companions]. Folin estimates that, in total, the female court occupied no more than twenty rooms, “in cui le nobildonne si trovavano a condividere i medesimi spazi con i propri domestici, a stretto contatto con alcuni ambienti di servizio come le cucine, la lavanderia, la stanza ‘dali rechamaduri’ e i magazzini della Grascia” [in which

¹⁴ Ondedio, *Cronaca*, ff. 5v–6r; Tuohy, 62–65. The *pozòli*, or *poggiòli*, faced the *banchi*, or bankers’ tables in the square below.

¹⁵ Tuohy, 65–70.

¹⁶ Marco Folin, “La corte della duchessa: Eleonora d’Aragona a Ferrara,” in *Donne di potere nel Rinascimento*, ed. Letizia Arcangeli and Susanna Peyronel (Rome: Viella, 2008), 481–512 (492). Tuohy provides the names conferred on these rooms according to the devices with which the walls were decorated; see Tuohy, 55.

the noblewomen found themselves sharing the same spaces with their own servants, in close contact with several service rooms like the kitchens, the laundry, the embroiderers' room and the storerooms].¹⁷ He suggests that Ercole did not have to make substantial change to these arrangements, due to the smallness of Eleonora's household in the early years of her marriage.¹⁸ From the list of "salarati" [paid staff] at the Estense court in 1476 recorded by Caleffini, we see that Eleonora's household consisted of twenty servants, with another twenty people comprising companions, chamberlains, squires, and various officials, all of whom were Ferrarese, and a small but unspecified number of Neapolitan ladies-in-waiting].¹⁹

Eleonora and her household would live in the more intimate surroundings of the Palazzo di Corte until after Niccolò di Leonello's attempted coup in September 1476, it was decided that they should move permanently to new apartments in the more-easily protected *Castello vecchio* as soon as practicable. Caleffini reports that, on Ercole's orders, work began in the castle on 4 March 1477, "per alzarlo et farli molte camere per poterlo poi habitare la excellentia de madama sua consorte" [to rebuild it and to create many rooms there so that then the Excellent Madama, his wife, may live there].²⁰ Much of this work was completed while Eleonora was in Naples for her father's wedding, and the new apartments were ready for occupation in December 1477.

First Pregnancy

Within three months of her arrival in Ferrara, Eleonora was pregnant. Diomede Carafa acknowledged the propitious event in a rather ambiguous letter to Ercole, dated

¹⁷ Folin, "La corte della duchessa," 492–93.

¹⁸ Folin, "La corte della duchessa," 493.

¹⁹ Folin, "La corte della duchessa," 493. Caleffini, 156–57.

²⁰ Caleffini, 241.

8 October 1473.²¹ Carafa's reference to the fact that it had been Sigismondo, and not Ercole, who had given him the news, and that it was he (Carafa) who had given this important news to Ferrante, suggests that, once again, he was critical of Ercole. To this thinly-veiled criticism may be added the sense that Carafa was jealous because Ercole had Eleonora as his wife, and that he was resentful that the marriage appeared to be happy. As usual, Carafa closed with the obligatory piece of advice, urging caution at this very early and uncertain stage of Eleonora's pregnancy: "Ve suplico <che> [...] aiate bona advertencia fine <che> non se veda che rine ave, nè consentate <che> se apronta" [I beg you [...] to be very careful until it is seen how her urine is and do not permit them to start preparing for it].²²

A second letter from Naples acknowledging the news of the pregnancy was sent to Eleonora herself by her brother, Alfonso, duke of Calabria, on behalf of his father and their friends and family in Naples.²³ Although the year is missing from the date at the bottom of this letter, the mention of Eleonora's pregnancy, obviously her first, allows it to be given the date 24 September 1473. Addressing her with in a combination of formal and informal terms, "Illustrissima duchessa mia multo cara et amata soro" [Most Illustrious Duchess, my dearest and most beloved sister], Alfonso voiced none of Carafa's misgivings about the pregnancy, but he assured Eleonora that her news had given Ferrante and "tucti nui da qua" [all of us here] the greatest pleasure. With God's blessing she would come through this pregnancy, "ad salvamento con un gentil figliolo mascolo" [safely, with a fine baby boy], adding in the tone of a bossy older brother, "da l'altro canto non me pare pretermetere de recordarve quelle cose tochano in honore

²¹ Moores, "Diomede Carafa," 386–87.

²² Eleonora would have been just two months pregnant at this stage. Her first child, Isabella, was born 18 May 1474. Significantly, Ercole's half-brother, Alberto, would be sent into exile in Naples just three days before the birth; see *Diario ferrarese di autori incerti*, 90 and Caleffini, 72–73.

²³ ASMo, Estero, Principi e Signorie, Naples-Sicily, busta 2, autograph letter from Alfonso Duke of Calabria to Eleonora d'Aragona, Castel Capuano, 24 [September 1473].

vostro” [on the other hand, it doesn’t seem to me to be presumptuous to remind you that these matters impinge on your honour]. Then it was time for some ribald speculation about the speed with which she had become pregnant: “qua s’è facto uno grande dicere che pare ve aia saputo tanto buono el stregnerve con lo Signore duca vostro che incontinente ve ha ingrossator el ventre” [there’s been a lot of talk here that you so enjoyed embracing your duke that he made your belly great immediately], recalling the letter which he had written to her soon after her arrival in Ferrara, expressing his pleasure that “comenzate ad acceptare li consiglie mei esser veri et boni” [you are beginning to accept that my advice is true and good], and his hope that “ogne dì vene recordarite meglio et meterite in effecto per lo tempo perduto” [every day you will remember it better and put it into effect to make up for lost time].²⁴ This advice seems to have been about Eleonora’s need to win Ercole over in the marriage bed and to make herself sexually indispensable to him, not always an easy task in an arranged marriage of convenience, when the couple scarcely knew each other before the wedding night. In her exploration of the accomplishments which were indispensable to young dynastic brides such as Eleonora, Mazzi refuses to ignore the importance of sexual chemistry to the success of the marriage:

Nello stesso tempo sanno che tutta questa fatica, questo addestramento, questo sacrificio di studio si rivelerà inutile se esse non riusciranno nella loro operazione più importante: sedurre lo sposo, tenerne a freno le infedeltà, legarlo definitivamente a sé procurandogli un erede maschio [At the same time they know that all this hard work, this training, this sacrifice of study will reveal itself to be useless if they don’t succeed in their most important task: seducing their husband, keeping his infidelities in check, binding him to them definitively by giving him a male heir].²⁵

²⁴ See above Chapter 3, 106–08.

²⁵ Maria Serena Mazzi, *Come rose d’inverno: le signore della corte estense nel ‘400* (Ferrara: Comunicarte, 2004), 13.

The mutual affection, which the couple expressed to each other in the correspondence marking their separations, suggests that Eleonora was extremely successful in her early wooing of Ercole. Mazzi could well be referring to Eleonora: “soltanto la moglie feconda, e felice procreatrice di maschi, può considerarsi effettivamente insediata al potere, presso i sudditi, negli affetti e nella stima del marito’ [only the fertile wife, and the fortunate producer of male children, might consider herself effectively established in power, over her subjects, <as> in the affections and the respect of her husband].²⁶

The hoped-for boy child did not come at once. Eleonora’s first baby was a girl, born on 17 May 1474. At the end of June, the child was baptised with the name Isabella, after her maternal grandmother. Eleonora’s sense of disappointment was reflected in her letter to Barbara of Brandenburg, written only two days after the birth.²⁷ While she was obviously happy that she had been safely delivered of “una bella donzeleta” [a beautiful little girl], she was not writing to everyone with the news, only to Barbara and her daughter, Margherita, since “non sia costume scrivere per nascimento de fanzulete” [it is not customary to write about the birth of girl children]. The following year, Eleonora was to again to disappoint with the birth, on 29 June 1475, of a second daughter, to be named Beatrice, after Eleonora’s sister, Beatrice d’Aragona. The anonymous diarist echoed the mood of the people, “nascete una fiola al duca Ercole...et non si fece allegrezza, perchè volea ch’el fusse maschio” [a daughter was born to duke Ercole ... and there was no rejoicing because he wished that it were a boy].²⁸

²⁶ Mazzi, 13. Eleonora’s sister, Beatrice d’Aragona, produced no children during her marriage to Matthias Corvinus. Although her marriage was apparently happy, she was not popular among her subjects, partly because of her failure to produce an heir; see E. Pásztor, “Beatrice d’Aragona, regina d’Ungheria,” <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/beatrice-d-aragona-regina-d-ungheria> (Dizionario-Biografico), accessed 31.5.2011.

²⁷ ASMa, Archivio Gonzaga, Lettere degli Estensi ai Signori di Mantova, busta 1182, letter from Eleonora of Aragon to Barbara of Brandenburg, Ferrara, 19 May 1474.

²⁸ *Diario ferrarese*, 90. The disappointment which followed the birth of Beatrice appears to have rendered her almost invisible. At the conclusion of his description of the baptism of Alfonso in October 1476, Caleffini proudly boasts: “Filippo Califfino mio fratello, scutiero de la illustrissima madama, in questo tempo portava [il putto] per la terra et casa del signore in braze et a mane la illustre madama Isabella, fia

The Banishment of Alberto d'Este

Only days before the birth of Isabella, amidst a scandal of immense proportions, Ercole banished his half-brother, Alberto, to whom he had apparently been very close.²⁹ The immediate cause was said to be Alberto's refusal to obey an order from Ercole, "che 'l dovesse montare a chavalò e andare contra el re de Dazia per honorarlo" [that he should mount his horse and go to meet the king of Denmark in order to show his respect for him].³⁰ Alberto's refusal to follow Ercole's orders would have been a major embarrassment to the duke, and Caleffini reports that, furious about his brother's insubordination, Ercole had consulted his Council of Justice, who advised him that Alberto was guilty of the crime of lese-majesty which was punishable by death and the confiscation of his property.³¹ This sentence was commuted to exile in Naples, and Alberto was ordered that "fra tri zorni sequenti l'havesse vodato et sgomborato il suo paese" [within three days, he should have vacated his property and departed his homeland], so that he would be in Naples within the fortnight. All Alberto's appeals for clemency rebuffed by Ercole, he rode to the castle "a tore l'ultima licentia et combiato da la excellentissima madama nostra" [to take his final leave and commission from our

legitima et naturale primogenita de la prefata illustrissima madama duchessa" [Filippo Caleffini, my brother, squire to the Most Illustrious Madama, at this time carried the infant through the town and into My Lord's residence, holding him in his arms, and held the hand of the Most Illustrious Madama Isabella, legitimate, first daughter of the Most Illustrious Madama the duchess]. There is no mention at all of Beatrice; see Caleffini, 195.

²⁹ Born in 1436 or 1437, Alberto was a natural son of Niccolò III and Philippa della Tavola, and a full brother of Gurone d'Este; see Ferrarini, 127 and 353, nn. 15–16. He had been a leading member of the party which escorted Eleonora from Naples in 1473.

³⁰ King Christian was visiting Modena on his return from a visit to Rome. Pastor describes Christian, king of Denmark's visit to Rome 6–27 April 1474; see Pastor, 4:258–61. He continued to Mantua (his Queen, Dorothea of Brandenburg, was the sister of Barbara of Brandenburg, Marchioness of Mantua), and was greeted with a Latin oration, published as *Oratio ad Christiernum, regem Daciae, habita Mantuae 12 Maii 1474* (Mantua: Pietrus Adam de' Micheli); see facsimile and essay in Filippo Nuvoloni, *Fra Christian I's Italienreise, 1474*, ed. Christiern Pedersen (Copenhagen: Kongelige Bibliotek, 1984).

³¹ Alberto's insubordination must be viewed in light of the complex arrangements put into place by Galeazzo Sforza in order to honourably welcome the king of Denmark to Milan. Galeazzo had ordered two of his brothers, four councillors and several gentlemen to escort Christian's party from the Venetian border, and at a town near Milan, he himself had gone out to meet the king, escorting him into the city "accompanied by all the court in the grandest order, that was a stupendous thing to see"; see Lubkin, 182–84 and 343, nn. 141–47.

most excellent Madama], remaining there with her “una grosissima hora” [for over an hour] and hoping no doubt that she might agree to intercede on his behalf. That she stood by Ercole in this situation suggests not only loyalty but sound common sense, at a time when there was still no legitimate heir to the ducal title and it was therefore essential that he impose his personal authority over all his subjects, including his own brothers.

Caleffini describes the scenes of public grief when Alberto left Ferrara: “erano di cittadini mille a tocarli la mane, a li quail il tochò a tuti, a tuti et piccoli et grandi la mano, et basioli, tolendo l’ultima licentia” [there were a thousand citizens there to touch his hand, and he touched the hands of these people, both small and large, and kissed them, taking his final leave]. The diarist then becomes almost strident in his recitation of Alberto’s charms, insisting that he was, “bellissimo de persona, elloquente, amatissimo da ogni homo, zovene de anni 36 vel circa, richo che havea di ducati decedotomia de intrata ogni anno, liberalissimo et splendido et teneva di cavalli cento et più in casa sua. Vestiva meglio che signori gli fusseno de loro, fora il duca; et similiter era tuto zentile et acostumato et amoroso de le done” [the handsomest of men, eloquent, much loved by everybody, young – thirty-six or thereabouts – rich, having an income of 18,000 ducats per year, generous and grand; he kept a hundred horses and more at his house. He dressed better than any of the nobles of his circle, except for the duke, and similarly he was noble, well-mannered, and a great one with the ladies].³² It is then that Caleffini suggests the unthinkable possibility that: “questo fu proprio il diavolo che fra lui et il signore sophiò et non fu per certo homo humano” [it was really the devil that whispered strife between him and the duke, it certainly wasn’t any human being], the devil in this case being the jealousy which Ercole felt towards his younger, more attractive and

³² Caleffini, 72.

sound-limbed brother, a man who was possibly too successful with other men's wives, including Eleonora herself, and, most dangerous of all, a man who was far too popular with the people of Ferrara. The only description of Ercole from this period, in which he is seen as "de natura saturnino e non de molte parole e ha la lingua un puocho malchiara" [gloomy by nature and a man of few words, his speech a little unclear], suggests that he may well have been prone to insecurity about his own image.³³ He was also lame from the injury to his foot sustained at the battle of Molinella, so that he apparently used a cane for walking³⁴ and he would become increasingly prone to associated feverish illnesses that would confine him to his apartments for long periods.³⁵

The Legacy of Diomede Carafa: *I doveri del principe*

It is not known when Diomede Carafa gave Eleonora his treatise on the duties of a ruler. It may well have been his wedding present to the young princess, his set of instructions for her journey to Ferrara having been but a foretaste of the vast store of practical knowledge that he wished to share with her.³⁶ Although originally in Italian, Eleonora had Battista Guarino prepare a Latin translation in 1474 (Fig.10).³⁷

³³ Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene, secretary to Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, is describing his impressions of Ercole after seeing him on the River Po near Ferrara; see ASMa, Carteggio degli inviati e diversi, Ferrara, busta 122, letter from Giovanni Pietro Arrivabene to Ludovico Gonzaga, Ferrara, 25 May 1473.

³⁴ Fig.2; see Chap. 2, 97.

³⁵ The first diary reference to this illness is on 24 July 1476 when Caleffini notes that "el duca tunc havea uno pocho de febra" [at that time the duke had a little fever]; see Caleffini, 175.

³⁶ Diomede Carafa, "I doveri del principe," in his *Memoriali*, 97–209. James suggests that the work was a wedding gift to Eleonora from Carafa; see James, "'Machiavelli in Skirts,'" 58.

³⁷ Giambattista Guarino later was tutor to both Isabella and Beatrice d'Este. A second translation was also commissioned from Colantonio Lentolo, who died in 1482 as bishop of Rapollo in Basilicata. The date of 1477 on this manuscript suggests that Eleonora may have commissioned this second translation during her visit to Naples in 1477, either for her personal use or to make its contents more accessible to non-Italian speakers.

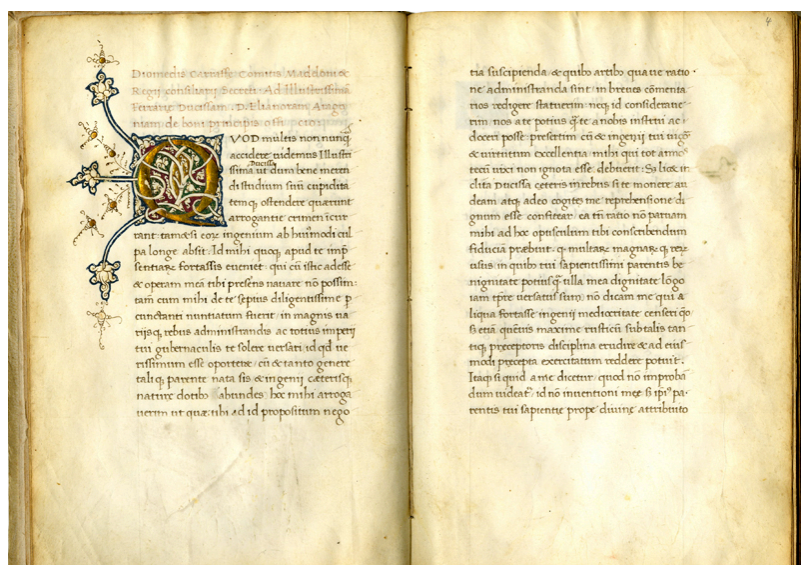


Figure 9: Dedication to Eleonora d’Aragona in Battista Guarino’s Latin translation of Diomede Carafa’s *I doveri del principe* as *De regentis et boni principis officii*, ff. 3v–4r. Ferrara c. 1474. Sale catalogue, Les Enluminures, Paris, www.textmanuscripts.com, Ref. 396, accessed 7 July 2011.

Carafa’s work is no humanist *speculum principis*, in the style of Pontano’s *De principe* and Maio’s *De maiestate*.³⁸ Folin describes it instead as “una sorta di prontuario di consigli pratici” [a type of manual of practical advice], written for the guidance of the young duchess at the dawn of her career as the consort of the duke of Ferrara.³⁹ Miele suggests that Carafa’s treatise had been inspired by the count’s personal observation that both Alfonso I and Ferrante had needed “combattere e superare il frazionamento e le tendenze centrifughe della classe baronale e di restaurare [...] l’autorità della monarchia” [to fight and overcome the divisiveness and breakaway tendencies of the

³⁸ For Pontano’s “De principe” (dedicated to Alfonso duke of Calabria in 1468) see *Prosatori latini del quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Milan/Naples: Ricciardi, 1952), 1019–63. Maio’s work was dedicated to Ferrante in 1492; see Iuniano Maio, *De maiestate*, ed. Franco Gaeta (Bologna: Commissione per i Testi di Lingua, 1956; Scelta di curiosità letterarie inedite o rare dal secolo XIII al XIX, Dispensa 250).

³⁹ Folin, “La corte della duchessa,” 491. Gilbert writes of Carafa’s style: “like his contemporaries, he was fond of quoting maxims from ancient authors and apophthegms from traditional controversies; but he is basically concerned only with the practical lessons to be drawn from these generalizations”; Felix Gilbert, “The Humanist Concept of the Prince and the Prince of Machiavelli,” *The Journal of Modern History* 11 (1939): 449–83 (469).

baronial class [...] to restore the authority of the monarchy].⁴⁰ Writing in his now-familiar, intensely didactic style, Carafa seeks to pass on to Eleonora the lessons which he has learned, and the wisdom he has acquired, in roles which ranged from soldier to diplomat and political advisor.

As well as his emphasis on the need for sound administrative practice and accountability, Carafa sets great store by the ideal of a benevolent ruler, who seeks to govern wisely and justly, and to create and maintain peace and prosperity in the state for the benefit of all his subjects. Despite the gender-exclusive title by which it is generally known today, *I doveri del Principe* [The Duties of the Prince],⁴¹ Carafa leaves no doubt that his work is intended for Eleonora herself, referring to Ercole only indirectly, and personalising his appeal to Eleonora with the familiar “Madamma mia” [my *Madama*], and the revelation that his inspiration is the exemplary rule of “la Maiestà del signore Re vostro patre” [His Majesty the King, your father].

The work is divided into four basic sections, the first three defining the public responsibilities of the ruler and their execution, while the fourth is the apotheosis of the ruler who follows such advice. In his first section, Carafa describes the ruler’s responsibility to administer both a stable government and a judicious foreign policy, with the guidance of a small number of carefully-chosen, trusted advisors. He introduces the theme, which permeates the whole work, of a ruler’s personal responsibility for the welfare of his subjects: “questa parte dirò essere non solamente bona, ma necessaria, de accarizare li subditi et scotarli et darli audientia, la Illustrissima Signoria vostra la have

⁴⁰ Lucia Miele, “Tradizione e ‘esperienza’ nella precettistica politica di Diomede Carafa,” *Atti dell’Accademia Pontaniana*, n.s. 24 (1976): 141–51 (142).

⁴¹ This title was coined by Carafa’s biographer, Tommaso Persico; see Persico, 147. Persico’s text of *I doveri del principe* is a composite version, in which the first and final sections missing from the original Italian version are replaced by Guarino’s Latin translation; see Persico, 261–96. In her modern edition of the collected *memoriali*, Nardelli places the original, incomplete, Italian version opposite the two intact Latin translations, that of Colantonio Lentulo, labelled IIIbis and Guarino’s version, commissioned by Eleonora herself, labelled IIIter. For details of manuscripts and early editions, see Carafa, *Memoriali*, 13–40.

da Dio questa gratia” [this part I will say is not only good but essential, that you cherish your subjects, look after them and give them audience, <as> this grace has been given to your Most Illustrious Ladyship by God].⁴²

In his second section, Carafa counsels the ruler to be scrupulous about the fair and compassionate dispensation of justice, “la quale è radice de omne prosperità et bene da venire de chi nde èi curioso et chy solo certamente la fagorisse” [which is the root of all prosperity and good, coming from one who cared about it and who surely favoured it].⁴³ And soon after he adds, “La iustitia è cosa senza la quale non se porria vivere” [Justice is something without which you cannot live].⁴⁴ The emphasis of Carafa’s third section is on financial matters, in particular the need for the ruler to ensure that records are kept of income and expenditure in all areas and at all levels of public administration, with the exception of the Lord’s expenses: “le intrate porrite sapere certe, ma de li exiti ad uno Signore èi impossibile haverne certeze” [your will know for certain the income, but with the Lord’s expenditure it is impossible to be certain].⁴⁵ However, referring to Eleonora’s own household expenses, he hastens to say, “le spese ordinarie de casa dela vostra Signoria non dubito stanno in perfectione” [I don’t doubt that Your Ladyship’s normal expenses are in perfect order].⁴⁶ Carafa concludes by advising Eleonora that, if she balances the books and ensures that her subjects are well provided for, they will reward her with their loyalty, love and respect. His fourth and final section is a summation of his ideas on the rewards which will accrue to a benevolent ruler from his subjects:

Palaremo de la quarta parte, dicta de le cose puplice, como se have da havere bona sollicitudine de li subditi, secundo la conditione de quilli. Èi cosa manifesta che como lo patre have cura de soy filglyoli, cossi lo Signore la deve havere de soy subditi. [We will

⁴² Carafa, *Memoriali*, 131.

⁴³ Carafa, *Memoriali*, 149.

⁴⁴ Carafa, *Memoriali*, 151.

⁴⁵ Carafa, *Memoriali*, 167.

⁴⁶ Carafa, *Memoriali*, 185.

speak of the fourth part, referring to public issues, how one should have great concern for one's subjects with regard to their living conditions. It is plain that as the father cares for his children, so should the Lord take care of his subjects.]⁴⁷

Explaining to Eleonora in his dedicatory letter, which now exists only in Guarino's Latin translation, that the distance between them has made it incumbent on him to write this work, it would be difficult to fail to notice the sense of love, respect and pride in his words:

Qui cum istic adesse et operam tibi praesens navare non possim, tamen cum mihi de te saepius diligentissime percunctanti nuntiatum fuerit in magnis variisque rebus pertractandis ac totius imperii tui gubernaculis te solere versari (id quod verissimum esse oportet, cum et tanto genere talique parente nata sis et ingenii caeterisque naturae dotibus abundes) [On this occasion I am unable to be where you are and to perform my task for you in person. On the numerous occasions when I earnestly enquired about you, I was told that you are wont to occupy yourself with various, great matters and with the governance of your entire state (this must be absolutely true as you are the child of such a great family and of such a father and have in abundance the gifts of intelligence and the other gifts of nature)].⁴⁸

Eleonora's appreciation of the value of Carafa's advice was confirmed when she had the work translated into Latin so that, "ut non solum Italis, sed Exteris quoque nationibus prodesse" [so that it might be of help not only to Italians but also to foreign nations].⁴⁹ Guarino was clearly expressing Eleonora's own feelings when he acknowledged the great debt of gratitude which she owed Carafa, both for his constant guidance in her youth and for his continuing concern for her in her role as Ercole's consort:

Cum omnibus virtutibus abundare te semper iudicaverim, magnifice et amplissime vir Diomede, tum vero hoc in te praecipium esse cognovi, quod maximam habes in amore constantiam, quod quidem licet plurimis evidentissimisque argumentis persaepe antea perspexissem, tamen eo libello, quem de regis et boni principis officio proxime ad me

⁴⁷ Carafa, *Memoriali*, 191.

⁴⁸ Carafa, *Memoriali*, 108. Translation by David Fairservice. Carafa almost certainly never visited Eleonora in Ferrara, either because of the sensitivity of his role in Ferrante's government or, more simply, because he was nearly seventy years old when Eleonora arrived in Ferrara. Two of his sons did go to Ferrara, Giovanni Tommaso who travelled with the wedding *comitiva* in 1473 and Giovanni Antonio who conveyed the Order of the Ermine to Ercole in November 1475; see Caleffini, 43 and 127–29.

⁴⁹ Carafa, *Memoriali*, 106. Translation by David Fairservice.

misisti, sic me in sententia confirmasti, ut nulla ex parte id mihi obscurum aut ambiguum esse possit. Nam cum in patria iuvenilem aetatem meam erudire et ad bonorum morum disciplinam te mihi duces consiliatoremque et rectorem praebere nunquam destiteris, nunc scribendis ad me praeceptis tuis facile declarasti, non temporis spatio, non locorum intervallo, tuam erga me benevolentiam ulla ex parte labefactam aut imminutam esse. [Magnificent and distinguished Diomede, I have always considered that you abounded in all good qualities but what I knew to be your finest quality was the constancy of your love. I had often previously observed this through numerous and manifest proofs but your treatise on the duty of the king and of the good prince, which you recently sent me, has so strengthened me in my opinion that your constancy can in no way be obscure or doubtful. In my place of birth, you never ceased to instruct the days of my youth and never ceased to offer yourself as guide, advisor and director in my learning of good morality. Now, by writing down your precepts to me, you have abundantly shown that your benevolence towards me has in no way grown weaker or less intense with the passage of time and because of the distance between us.]⁵⁰

This letter is eloquent in its acknowledgement of the strong bond of affection and mutual respect that had developed between Carafa and Eleonora during her youthful education at Ferrante's court.

Carafa's only concession to Eleonora's gender is that, as a woman, she must establish her own credibility within Ercole's court, choosing only a small number of advisors and, most importantly of all, learning to be discreet and defying the popular belief "che naturalmente le donne non songo secrete et tutto lo di in le storie romane se nde ragiona" [that women, by their nature, cannot keep a confidence, and they spend all day in talk about tales of romance].⁵¹ This emphasis on the need for discretion and confidentiality in government is a recurring theme in Carafa's letters to both to Eleonora and Ercole, a reflection of the perilous and uncertain times in which they all lived. Because he knows her so well, however, he is confident of her ability to disprove the sexual stereotype:

⁵⁰ Carafa, *Memoriali*, 100. Translation by David Fairservice.

⁵¹ Carafa, *Memoriali*, 117.

Io ve cognosco et non ne dubito che vostra Signoria lli pecasse, ma èi bisogno incitare li consilglyeri con chy negotiarite ad questo habiano bona avertentia, et tanto più quanto vostra Signoria lli cape che non volorissimo lo signore vostro marito havesse da credere vui, como donna, dicissimo; et per questa causa, per scolpare vostra Signoria medesimo, sempre ne senteriti de alcuno non sia secreto, llo diriti ad vostro marito [I know you, and I do not suspect that Your Ladyship would err in this regard, but you must urge those counsellors with whom you do business [that] they should be careful in this regard, and all the more since your Ladyship understands that you would not wish your Lord husband to think that you, as a woman, would blab; and for this reason, so that your Ladyship avoids being blamed, any time that you hear that someone is not discrete, you should tell your husband].⁵²

Guerra maintains that, being totally unknown in Ferrara, Eleonora would have found herself “nella condizione di dovere dimostare il suo valore e la sua probità dinanzi a tutta la corte” [in the position of having to demonstrate her worth and her integrity to the whole court].⁵³ Carafa had clearly been aware of the difficulties that she would have to confront at the Estense court, which had had no female figure of authority for for almost almost twenty-five years.

Eleonora’s performance of her duties as Ercole’s consort, and sometime regent, suggests that she took to heart much of the advice which Carafa had given her in his *memoriale*. Her letters to Ercole reveal that she was intimately involved in the administration of justice, often intervening on behalf of aggrieved parties, including many members of Ferrara’s Jewish community, for whom she appeared to have particular sympathy.⁵⁴ At the end of a diatribe on Ercole’s sale of public offices and his

⁵² Carafa, *Memoriali*, 117.

⁵³ Guerra, “Eleonora d’Aragona,” 114.

⁵⁴ A curious example of this is contained in a letter in which Eleonora describes her intervention on behalf of a Jew accused of blasphemy for having a silver goblet with an image of “la forma del crucifixo cum Nostra Dona e S. Gioanni da li lati” [the Crucifixion with Our Lady and St John on the sides] stamped on its base. The man was found to be innocent of the charges as Eleonora had realized that the stamp was a German hallmark; see ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, busta 132, letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Ferrara, 22 April 1479.

lack of interest in matters of state, Caleffini claims that Eleonora had assumed many of her husband's neglected duties:

In questo tempo el duca de Ferrara universalmente tuti li suoi officii, et grandi et piccoli, et de forteze et del Comune, vendeva a chi più ge ne dava, pigliando prima li denari, et vendendo per dui anni et non per più; et però veneva suxo gente ingognite ad havere offitii. Il duca Ercole ogni giorno cavalcava nel Barco con i suoi uccellatori e i balestrieri a cavallo. E poco se impazava de cossa alchuna, per cui la duchessa dava audientia et spazava tute le facende como Signore [At this time, the duke of Ferrara universally sold all his offices, both large and small, whether in fortresses or in government, to whomever gave the most, taking the money first and selling <them for> two years and no more; and thus it happened that unknown people had offices. Duke Ercole rode every day in the Barco with his falconers and archers. And he bothered himself little with anything, because of which the duchess gave audience and settled all matters as if she were the duke].⁵⁵

A single page found in a box of miscellaneous documents in the *Archivio di Stato* in Modena, titled “Recordi che facea la Excellentia de Madama” [Memorandum of what Her Excellency Madama's duties was accustomed to do], contains a list of the duties which Eleonora performed, apparently on a regular basis, in her role as ducal consort, although, as the document is undated, it is impossible to know to which part of Eleonora's career it belongs.⁵⁶ Its significance lies, however, in what it reveals about her conscientiousness in personally ascertaining from public officials, at regular intervals, the state of the duchy's finances and seeing that up-to-date records were kept of all transactions, both income and expenditure.⁵⁷ (Appendix, Document 10) Eleonora also supervised the maintenance of properties and waterways on the ducal estates, checked that administrators and stewards were doing their jobs, ensured that adequate supplies of

⁵⁵ Caleffini, 666.

⁵⁶ ASMo, Casa e Stato, Ramo ducale, Documenti spettanti a principi estensi, principi non regnanti, busta 376/19, *Recordi che facea la Excellentia de Madama*. Folin has given the document a possible date of 1479; see Folin, “La corte della duchessa,” 511.

⁵⁷ A small bundle of accounts, listing moneys received by Eleonora from both individuals and estates for the period 1479–81, and goods purchased by her in 1481, reveal that this punctilious record-keeping extended into her own personal affairs; see ASMo, Casa e Stato, Ramo ducale, Documenti spettanti a principi estensi, Principi non regnanti, busta 376/19.

grain and feedstocks were available both for the people of Ferrara and as well as for livestock, and supervised the provision of meat and poultry and the baking of bread. She had even taken it upon herself to personally see that visitors to Ferrara were well accommodated and that their property was kept secure during their stay.

Letters from Carafa

Carafa continued in his role as Ferrante's spokesperson in the letters which he wrote to Ercole after Alberto d'Este's banishment to Naples in 1474. On 25 May 1474, Ercole dispatched a set of instructions to his ambassador in Naples, Mengo dalle Armi, setting out what he was to convey to Diomede Carafa about the terms of his brother, Alberto's, exile in Naples.⁵⁸ It appears that the good count had been entrusted by Ferrante with the management of Alberto's exile, and, familiar already with Carafa's overbearing nature, Ercole warned his ambassador to be firm in his dealings with him. Alberto is to be given 4,000 ducats a year and Ercole reveals that he is about "togliere in camera tuto quello che 'l teneva dal canto de qua" [to confiscate everything he owned here]. Urging Mengo to keep these details secret, Ercole added a postscript, asking him to include "la risposta del conte de Urbino e del conte da Madaloni, ali quali scrivemo perché ne habiano ad essere compatri della figlia ne ha parturito la Illustrissima nostra consorte" [the reply from the counts of Urbino and Matalone, to whom I wrote because they have to join us as godfathers of the daughter whom our Most illustrious wife has delivered].⁵⁹

When Carafa replied on 29 June 1474, it was to tell Ercole that, while the king "ave non meno cura et affecione ad onne vostra particolarità che se aia ad le proprie"

⁵⁸ ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1, instructions from Ercole d'Este to Mengo dalle Armi, Ferrara, 25 May 1474. Mengo dalle Armi was Ercole's roving ambassador to Naples, the Papacy and elsewhere when needed, until his death in October 1477.

⁵⁹ Caleffini reports that these two men did agree to be Isabella's godfathers, together with Federigo Gonzaga, heir to Mantua, and the bishop of Policastro, Ferrante's ambassador in Ferrara; see Caleffini, 73.

[has no less concern and affection for every detail of your life than he has for his own children], the duke would do well “non tocarli alle robe” [not to touch (Alberto’s) property].⁶⁰ Insisting that they had no intention of interfering in the matter, Carafa suggested that, “avendove Idio facta gracia de uno sì facto patre, quisto ey una de le cose <che> ve dovite valere de la Maestà Sua” [God having given you the grace of having such a father, this is one of the things which you should value in his Majesty]. Writing again on 29 August 1474,⁶¹ Carafa revealed that, while Alberto had been happy to receive a letter from Ercole, he had not been happy “de la mia inbassata” [that I was the messenger], suggesting that Alberto was already distrustful of the Neapolitan’s intentions in relation to Ercole. On a lighter note, Carafa wanted Ercole to know that Federico d’Aragona would be passing through Ferrara on his way to Burgundy, a visit which “sazo <che> piace ad Quella et ad Madama” [I know will please you and Madama].

On 25 October 1474, Carafa wrote that Federico had already set out on his journey, and that Ferrante has ordered him to convey his instructions to Ercole and Eleonora *a bocca*.⁶² The count then raised the issue that was later to have such profound effects on the relationship between Ferrara and Naples, a new alliance which the leaders of Milan, Venice and Florence “aveno cercata et cercano” [have sought and still seek]. Feigning amazement that such a thing would even be considered, Carafa added with a note of resignation, “ma andando in multe modi lo mundo al reverso, anche questo li pò andare” [but since the world is turned upside down in many respects, even this can happen].

In his letter of 20 November 1474, Carafa was open about Ferrante’s intention to

⁶⁰ Moores, “Diomedes Carafa,” 390–93.

⁶¹ Moores, “Diomedes Carafa,” 394–96.

⁶² Moores, “Diomedes Carafa,” 396–98.

dictate Ercole's relations with members of the proposed alliance: "certo piacerà alla Maestà Sua per diverse rispecte che la Signoria Vostra non aia de dire con dicto duca, ante le mostrate volere compiacere in cose possibile" [certainly it will please His Majesty in many respects if Your Lordship does not speak with the duke, before showing him that to you wish to please him (His Majesty) in every possible thing]⁶³

Revealing that he had not heard from Eleonora, he requested that Ercole:

non fate como fa Madama che starà dui et tre mise che non me responde ad multe littere <che> le scrivo, et po me vole fare risposta de tucte in uno tracto, chè, per ben <che> sia meglyo tardo che mai, puro foria più iusto respondere onne volta. Non dico <che> questo sia in la Signoria Vostra ma dico bene <che> ey in Madama [don't do what Madame does, who will wait for two or three months before replying to the many letters I write to her, and then she wants to reply to them all at once, so that, although it's better late than never, it would even be fairer to reply to every one. I'm not saying that this is in Your Lordship's nature, but I am saying that it is in Madama's].

There is a growing sense here that the couple have been ignoring Carafa's letters.

Writing from Naples, the count complained again on 9 December 1474: "non sto poco amirato che de tante littere <che> ve aio scripto non me aiate facta veruna risposta" [I'm not a little amazed that of the many letters which I've written to you, you have not given me any reply at all].⁶⁴ Then, alluding to Ferrante's growing closeness to Sixtus IV, he revealed that Ferrante was secretly planning a chance meeting with the pope: "lo Signor Re, facte feste, sarrà de qua, et penzo <che> anderà in terra de Roma con demonstracione de cazare; et talvolta forza se vederà collo Papa" [the king will be here after the holidays (the Immaculate Conception), and I think he will be going into Roman territory, ostensibly to hunt, and perhaps at some time he will meet up with the Pope]. Urging secrecy, he added: "ve suplico <che> no lla dica ad altro che ad Madama" [I beg you not to tell this to anyone other than Madama].

⁶³ Moores, "Diomedea Carafa," 398–400.

⁶⁴ Moores, "Diomedea Carafa," 400–02.

Ferrante's visit to Rome was the subject of Carafa's letter to Ercole on 9 March 1475.⁶⁵ Explaining that, "per essere Pietro el portatore de questa non sarrò prolioso avisarve de le cose dacquà" [as Pietro is the bearer of this letter, I will not go on at length informing you about things here], he continued: "de le ocorencie non li scrivo altro che quanto s'è dicto et facto in Roma commo la Vostra Illustrissima Signoria so <che> avite de continuo da Roma" [of the things that have happened, I'm not writing down for him, other than what has been said and done in Rome, as Your most Illustrious Lordship knows because you have constant news from Rome].⁶⁶ Ercole would have learned from the bearer of Carafa's letter that, having arrived in Rome on 28 January 1475, Ferrante had only stayed for three days, but that he had returned secretly to the city in February for meetings with Sixtus IV.⁶⁷

There is a long gap in the correspondence until Carafa's letter of 16 February 1476.⁶⁸ The suggestion is still that Ercole should follow Ferrante's lead in all his dealings with their fellow rulers: "de onne cosa <che> intenda et anco penze de simile natura che sempre de date noticia ad Sua Maestà" [with everything you hear, and even think to be of a similar nature, you should always tell His Majesty about it], because "li negocie <che> inportano a la Sua Maestà, che sono de brocha in facto vostro proprio" [the affairs which are important to His Majesty, are in fact completely your own].⁶⁹ The "negocie" that Carafa refers to probably concern Ercole's invitation to join the alliance of Venice, Milan and Florence, signed on 22 November 1474, an invitation which he

⁶⁵ Moores, "Diomedes Carafa," 402–03.

⁶⁶ This man is most likely to be Pietro de Monopoli, who was Ferrante's ambassador in Ferrara in 1477 and possibly before that. In a letter to Ludovico Gonzaga, Antonio Cannello reports that he had met "Missere Pietro de Monopol, ambasciatore dela Maestà del Signor Re" in Ferrara: see ASMa, Carteggio Gonzaga, Lettere degli Estensi ai Signori di Mantova, busta 1182, letter from Antonio Cannello to Ludovico Gonzaga, 5 August 1477.

⁶⁷ Pastor, 4:279–80.

⁶⁸ Moores, "Diomedes Carafa," 403–05.

⁶⁹ *De brocha* or *de brocca*, 'completely'; see Lupis, "Note linguistiche" in Carafa, *Memoriali*, 413.

had actually accepted publicly in Ferrara on 14 February 1475. Naples and the Papacy had already declined invitations to join this alliance.

Again on 5 April 1476 Carafa warned Ercole about his dealings with the duke of Milan, that he should “sempre con lui andate cauto, che sempre potesse faria de vuy lo semmele” [always go carefully with him as he might always do the same with you].⁷⁰

Although in successive letters Carafa continued to assure Ercole of Ferrante’s approval of his handling his relations with Milan and neighbouring states, on 16 April he appealed to Ercole’s loyalty to the king:

Aviso la Signoria Vostra, como quello <che> ve aio in reputacione de li figlyiolj de lo Signor Re et como quello che moreria primo <che> ve dicesse altro che lo vero, che, se persona osasse dire, como soleno dire de la altre cose per odio, che la Maestà de lo Signor Re avesse nè practica nè sentimento nè consentimento con potencia tramontana in nulla minima cosa de Italia, dicatè essere falso et bosia [I advise Your Lordship, as one whom I respect as one of the sons of the king and as someone who would rather die than say other than the truth, that, should anyone dare to say, as they are wont to say about other things out of hatred, that His Majesty the king was having any traffic or sympathy or agreement with any power to the north in even the slightest way concerning Italy, you should say that it is false and a lie].

On 7 November 1475, a Neapolitan deputation led by Diomedè’s son, Giovanni Antonio Carafa, arrived in Ferrara, a potent demonstration of Ferrante’s desire to retain and cultivate Ercole’s support for his policies. Caleffini writes that Ercole “alozòlo in corte cum triompho grande” [entertained him at the Palazzo di Corte with great pomp] at his own expense.⁷¹ In a letter to Ercole, Perotto de Vesach, a Neapolitan courtier,

⁷⁰ Moores, “Diomedè Carafa,” 406–08. Galeazzo Sforza had increasingly looked west, towards alliances first with Burgundy and then with France; see Lubkin, 238.

⁷¹ Caleffini, 127–28. Giovanni Antonio Carafa, Diomedè Carafa’s second son, rose to the position of Vice Chancellor of Naples. He was the father of Giovanni Pietro Carafa who became Pope Paul IV; see *Cronaca figurata*, 36, 42, 46, 61 and 63. A letter from Ercole to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, recently discovered in the *Archivio di Stato* in Milan, shows that Ercole had been informed in advance that he was to receive the honour from Ferrante; see ASMi, Archivio Sforzesco, Potenze estere, Ferrara, b.323, letter from Ercole d’Este to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Ferrara, 4 November 1475. I thank Dott. Sergio Mantovani for drawing this letter to my attention.

revealed that it had been Diomede Carafa who had engineered the visit.⁷² Perotto wrote that, after returning from a visit to Ferrara, he had been quizzed about Ercole and Eleonora by members of Eleonora's family, in particular by her brother, Giovanni, whom Perotto refers to as his lord.⁷³ He also described a rather strange and intense meeting with Diomede Carafa, during which he was continually questioned about Ercole and Eleonora:

Anco aviso Vostra Signoria como lo conte de Matalune mandò per me che io dovesse andare ad parlare con Sua Signoria et me tenne più de secte hore in secreto con ipso de continuo domandanome de Vostra Illustrissima Signoria et de Madama vostra in modo che yo conossecti che senza fencione ipso èi vostro s'eruitore et parsiale che certo yo credo che non serria cosa alcuna de che Vostra Illustrissima Signoria lo incaricasse che non lo facesse et si me contò per sua fede che per fareve piacere ipso ad sue spese mandò lo figliolo con la impresa de Vostra Signoria et me domandò como stevevo contento de ipso. [I also must advise Your Lordship that the count of Matalone sent for me that I should go and speak to His Lordship and he kept me more than seven hours with him in secret, continually asking me about Your Most Illustrious Lordship and Madama, in such a way that I knew that without affectation he is your servant and biased in your favour, so that I believe that there will be nothing with which Your Most Illustrious Lordship could charge him that he would not do and thus he told me in good faith that, to please you, at his own expense, he sent his son with your Lordship's Order, and he asked me if you were happy with him].⁷⁴

⁷² ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naple, busta 1, letter from Perotto de Vesach to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 1 June [1476]. The date of this letter is based on textual references to imminent events, such as Beatrice d'Aragona's marriage by proxy to Matthias Corvinus.

⁷³ Perotto de Vesach is a rather mysterious figure, writing five very informative letters to Ercole, between June 1476 and February 1478, all of which imply a close connection with, and loyalty to, the Estense court. Because these letters have been filed with diplomatic letters from Naples, it has been assumed that Perotto was Ercole's ambassador in Naples; see *Il carteggio tra Beatrice d'Aragona e gli estensi (1476–1508)*, ed. Enrica Guerra (Rome:Aracne, 2010), 55, n. 4. However, textual references suggest that Perotto served Ercole's brother-in-law, Giovanni d'Aragona, who was created cardinal in 1477. In April 1479, Giovanni was appointed Papal Legate to Hungary by Sixtus IV, and Archbishop of Strigonia/Esztergom by Matthias Corvinus, and Perotto apparently accompanied him to Hungary, remaining there even after Giovanni's death in 1485; see Rózsa Feuer-Toth, *Art and Humanism in Hungary in the Age of Matthias Corvinus* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiado, 190), 49. His name appears in some of Beatrice d'Aragona's letters to Eleonora in 1486; see *Il carteggio tra Beatrice d'Aragona e gli estensi*, 53, 57, 62 and 71.

⁷⁴ ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Napoli, busta 1, letter from Perotto de Vesach to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 1 June 1476

The “impresa” which Carafa’s son took to Ferrara was Ferrante’s *Ordine dell’Armellino* [Order of the Ermine], inaugurated by him on the Feast of Saint Michael the Archangel on 29 September 1465, and dedicated to that saint, to mark his final ascendancy over the opponents to his succession.⁷⁵ While the conferral of Ferrante’s order on Ercole may be seen as inevitable after his marriage to Eleonora, it was also a great honour, and yet further evidence of the legitimacy of Ercole’s rule.⁷⁶ The Order was limited to twenty-seven nobles, led by Ferrante himself, his son, Alfonso, duke of Calabria, and his son, Ferrante, Prince of Capua, and it included the most powerful princes of the *Regno*, among whom was Diomedea Carafa himself.⁷⁷ Foreign membership of the Order was restricted to men whom Ferrante regarded as important to the security of his kingdom, among them Charles, duke of Burgundy, Federico da Montefeltro, duke of Urbino, Galeazzo Maria Sforza, duke of Milan, and Alessandro Sforza, Lord of Pesaro. The insignia of the Order was a gold ermine, enamelled in white, with the motto, “Decorum” [Propriety], and sometimes “Probanda” [Proved excellent], written beneath it. These were often replaced by Ferrante’s own motto, *Malo mori, quam foedari* [I prefer to die rather than be defiled] or “Death before Dishonour” (Fig. 10).⁷⁸

⁷⁵ It replaced the Angevin order of the *Luna crescente*; see Ruth Wilkins Sullivan, “Three Ferrarese Panels on the Theme of ‘Death rather Than Dishonour’ and the Neapolitan Connection,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 57(1994), 619, n. 17.

⁷⁶ Ferrante’s son-in-law, Matthias Corvinus, was also a member of the Order, while Federico d’Aragona carried the *impresa* to Burgundy in 1474 to confer it on Charles, duke of Burgundy; see Pontieri 1945, 70.

⁷⁷ D’Arcy J. D. Boulton, *The Knights of the Crown: the Monarchical Orders of the Knighthood in Later Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge/New York: Boydell Press, 1987), 414. The list of members of the Order included by Boulton is taken from the Statutes of the Order which have been conserved in the Abbey of the Holy Trinity in Cava. This manuscript was published in 1845 by Giuseppe Maria Fusco; see Giuseppe Maria Fusco, *Capitoli dell’ordine dell’Armellino* (Naples: Coster, 1845). A Latin copy of the manuscript is in the British Library, BL, Add. 28,628. The patent conferring the Order on Ercole is conserved in the Modena Archive; see ASMo, Casa e Stato, Documenti, Serie generale, membranacei, cassetta 25, Item 75, 17 October 1475, Naples, Patente di re Ferdinando d’Aragona nella quale instituisce suo mandatario Antonio Caraffa perchè partì al duca Ercole I d’Este l’ordine dell’armellino, alias di S. Michele.

⁷⁸ This is a reference to the Renaissance bestiary tradition which maintained that the ermine when captured would rather die of hunger or thirst than soil its coat by trying to escape; see Sullivan, 619. Sullivan suggests that Eleonora took this motto with her to Ferrara and that it was the inspiration for three panels, celebrating virtuous women from antiquity, that she reputedly commissioned from the court painter, Ercole de’ Roberti, to decorate her apartments. Caleffini describes the ceremony of conferral; see Caleffini, 129.

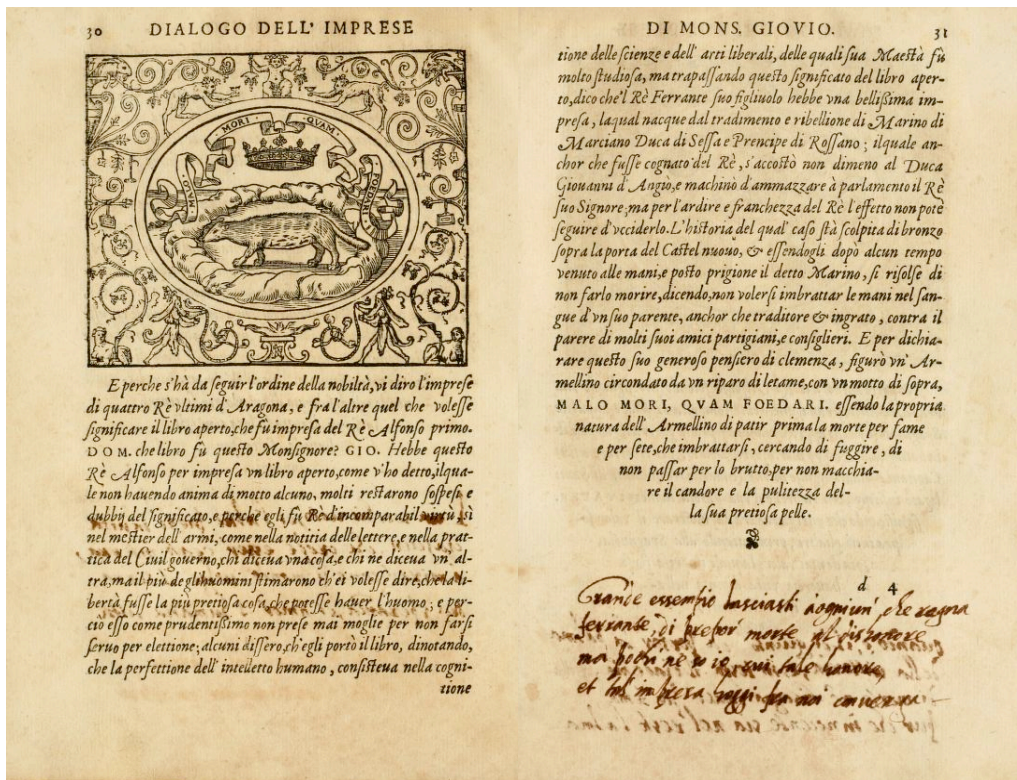


Figure 10: The impresa of the Order of the Ermine from the first illustrated edition of *Dialogo dell' imprese militari et amorose di monsignor Giovio, vescouo di Nocera; con un Ragionamento di messer Lodouico Domenichi, nel medesimo soggetto* (Lyon: Guglielmo Roviglio, 1559), 30–31. Early editions of the work, first published in 1555, contained only the text.

Niccolò di Leonello and the attempted coup

On 21 July 1476, within days of returning from a visit to Modena and Reggio, Eleonora gave birth to her first son, who would be referred to thereafter as the *primogenito*. He was to be called Alfonso Giovanni Maria Vincenzo Francesco, names which signalled the importance of his close blood ties with the House of Aragon. While the people of Ferrara celebrated his arrival with immoderate joy, Ercole acknowledged the bestowal of divine favour upon his house with a solemn procession of all the city's clergy through the streets of Ferrara, “per ringraziare il omnipotente Dio del fiolo nasciuto, a ciò che tal parto resti felice” [to thank Almighty God for the birth of a son, and to

ensure that good fortune accompanies this birth].⁷⁹ The child's baptism was delayed until 13 October 1476, when it was conducted "con grandissima solemnitade" [with the greatest solemnity] in the Cathedral by the bishop of Chioggia. The child's godparents were the ambassadors of Florence and Venice, a recognition of Ercole's alliance with those states, although no acknowledgment was made of the duke of Milan's membership.

The child was scarcely six weeks old when Ercole's former rival, Niccolò di Leonello, who had been biding his time in exile in Mantua, staged a well-organised, armed attack on Ferrara, in a final desperate attempt to impose his own legitimacy over that of Ercole.⁸⁰ Early on the morning of 1 September 1476, within hours of Ercole's departure for Belriguardo, where he had gone with members of his court to recuperate from a recent illness, Niccolò and a force of some six to seven hundred armed men, arrived outside the city walls, having travelled along the Po from Mantua in camouflaged boats.⁸¹ An element of inside knowledge must be assumed to explain the timing of Niccolò's attack, while Caleffini claims that Ercole "era stato avisato per 15 zorni avanti et la sira che la matina doveano intrare et mai non lo volse credere a persona alcuna" [had been warned a fortnight earlier, and the evening before, that they would enter the following morning, and he never wanted to believe anyone].⁸²

⁷⁹ Zambotti, 13.

⁸⁰ This was not his first attempt. The diarist, Ondedio da Vitale, records that two of Niccolò di Leonello's squires were apprehended while trying to take Rocca Possente on the Po, near the fortress of Stellata. They were hung in Ferrara on 7 December 1471; see Ondedio, f. 4v.

⁸¹ In his report of Alfonso's birth, Caleffini had noted "el duca tunc havea uno pocho de febra" [at that time the duke had a little fever]; see Caleffini, 175. One week later, 28 July 1476, Zambotti writes: "Se fece processione per la citade da frate e prete pregando lo omnipotente Idio volgia rendere la soa sanitate al duca nostro, il quale za più di fa sta molto male. E cusì se fece il di seguente" [There were processions of monks and priests through the city, praying that Almighty God would return the health of our duke, who had been very ill for several days]; see Zambotti, 14. In the second week of August 1476, Ercole had still been confined to his apartments when Hungarian ambassador visited Ferrara on the way to collect Beatrice d'Aragona from Naples; see Zambotti, 15.

⁸² Caleffini, 182. Zambotti also writes that Ercole had received "alchune lettere, le quale havea havute il di inanti sopra tal venuta, et non sene curava digando che messer Nicolò non seria venuto a Ferrara" [had several letters about such an incursion the day before, and he took no notice of them, judging that misser Nicolò would not come to Ferrara]; see Zambotti, 18.

Because of the element of surprise, the invaders were able to reach the centre of the city almost without resistance, whereupon they called to the people: “fradelli piati le arme, echo lo vero vostro signore che è venuto a liberarvi de le mano de chatelani e a darvi abondancia” [brothers, lay down your arms, here is your real Lord, who has come to free you from the hands of the Catalans and to give you all things in abundance].⁸³ Sigismondo d’Este who had remained in Ferrara as Ercole’s *luogotenente* was able to lead Eleonora, holding the infant heir in her arms and taking her two small daughters by the hand, from her apartments in the Palazzo di Corte along the Via Coperta to the relative security of the Castel Vecchio.⁸⁴ In the hand-to-hand fighting between men loyal to Ercole, led by Sigismondo and Rinaldo d’Este, and the followers of Niccolò, the so-called Veleschi, the invaders were overwhelmed.⁸⁵

With a strong sense of duty and scant regard for her own personal safety, Eleonora had insisted that Ercole not be recalled to Ferrara until Niccolò was captured.⁸⁶ When he finally returned to Ferrara the following day, he did so with a great show of strength, bringing with him “500 fanti da pede, tuti ferraresi et suoi subditi [...] tuti con le coracine indosso et celate in testa et spedi in mane” [500 foot soldiers, all Ferraresi and his subjects [...] all wearing cuirasses and helmets, and armed with swords].⁸⁷ However, the diarist, Zambotti, describes the duke’s emotional reponse at seeing Eleonora and his children safe and well:

⁸³ Ondedio, f. 7v.

⁸⁴ The anonymous diarist writes that Ercole had ordered the loggia, connecting his apartments with the secret passage between the two castles, to be covered soon after his election as duke and the banishment of Niccolò de Leonello: “Et incontinente ordinò il pegiolo coperto, che traversa la via de la sua Corte con la via secreta che va in Castello Vecchio, de la sua camara” [Instantly he ordered the loggia covered, which connects the courtyard and the secret way to the Castel Vecchio from his apartment]; see *Diario ferrarese*, 73. It is assumed that it was on account of Eleonora’s sense of insecurity after this attempted coup that, in February the following year, work began on a set of apartments for her and her children in the Torre Marchesana of the more secure Castel Vecchio; see Tuohy, 71.

⁸⁵ Niccolò had adopted his father Leonello’s *impresa*, the *vela* [sail]; see Gundersheimer, *Ferrara: the Style of a Renaissance Despotism*, 181.

⁸⁶ Ercole had retreated to Lugo, a small Estense town in the Romagna close to Ravenna; see Caleffini, 182.

⁸⁷ Caleffini, 183.

Vedando la molgie e fioli al pozolo de la Corte tuti pianzere de alegrezza, non se potè continere che anche lui comenzò pianzere de dolceza de la fideltade del populo. E subito dismontò e intrò in domo e andò al altare a ringraziare Dio, che l'ha liberato da grandissimo periculo de la vita e del Stato suo. [Seeing his wife and children on the balcony of the Palazzo di Corte, all of them weeping with joy, he was not able to contain himself and he too began to weep with emotion at the loyalty of the people. And straightaway he dismounted and went into the cathedral and up to the altar to thank God for having freed him from the greatest danger to his life and to his state.]⁸⁸

Ercole's display of emotion was obviously so out of character that it warranted special mention by Zambotti. The diarist's description of the duke's tears on seeing his wife and children alive and well is the first documentary evidence of the affection which had grown between the couple in the years since their marriage.

While all the plotters were tried, quickly executed and buried, “senza pompo e clero” [without ceremony and clergy], except for Niccolò de Leonello, whom family honour demanded should be buried among his Estense forebears. So it was that “in dicta matina fu per la terra, a sono de trombe, exortato tuto il populo de Ferrara per quel zorno a le vinti hore a fare honore al corpo de l'illustre messer Nicolò da Este” [that morning throughout the land, at the sound of trumpets, all the people of Ferrara were urged to pay their respects to the remains of the Illustrious Messer Niccolò da Este, at around two o'clock in the afternoon]. Caleffini describes the intense sadness of the occasion, at the same time highlighting Eleonora's gentle and sympathetic nature: “molti, considerato il caso, lo piangeano et madama duchessa per lo primo che piangesse, quando lo vide dal suo pozolo non se poté contenere de lacrimare bene forte” [many wept, considering the matter, and Madama the duchess was the first to weep.

⁸⁸ Zambotti, 19. All the other Ferrarese diarists recount the events of the attempted coup with varying degrees of detail.

When she saw him from her balcony, she could not restrain herself from crying bitterly].⁸⁹

News of the attempted coup travelled fast to Naples, and Ferrante wasted no time in writing to Ercole on 11 September 1476, protesting his “incredibile dispiacere vedendo essere fatta tal perturbatione nel vostro stato, la quiete et tranquillità del quale non è manco desiderata da nui che del nostro Regno” [unbelievable displeasure that such a disturbance has occurred in your state, the peace and tranquility of which is desired no less by us than that of our own Kingdom].⁹⁰ This is not the letter to be expected from a man to his son-in-law, whose wife and family have just escaped death and whose authority in his state has just been seriously threatened. Ferrante’s letter is formulaic and prefatory and suggests that he is out of sympathy with Ercole. However, he does offer to write to “l’Illustrissimo duca de Urbino et ali altri Signori de Romagna nostri stipendiati che cum tucto de loro gente bisognando devesse cavalcare et comparere in vostra favore et fare per conservatione defensione et beneficio del vostro stato quanto fariano per conservatione delo quello stato nostro” [the Most Illustrious duke of Urbino and the other lords of the Romagna, who are in our employ, telling them that, with all their men, they should ride forth to support you and act for the preservation, defence and welfare of your state, as they would do for the preservation of this state of mine]. There is no warmth in these words, and Ercole is urged to “stare de bona anima et ad fare tucte quelle provisione che siano al proposito dela difensione et conservatione del vostro stato” [keep in good spirits and make all those preparations which are appropriate for the defence and protection of your state]. While it is to be hoped that Ferrante expressed his real feelings in a personal letter to Eleonora which

⁸⁹ Caleffini, 186.

⁹⁰ ASMo, Cancelleria estense, Estero, Carteggio di principi e signorie, Naples-Sicily, busta 1, letter from Ferrante I of Naples to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 11 September 1476.

has not survived, there are clear signs here of a imminent breakdown in the relationship between Ferrante and Ercole, although the niceties of family reunions will continue to be observed for the foreseeable future.

Eleonora only had two visits from members of family in the early years of her marriage. On 4 December 1474, her younger brother, Federico, who was en route to the court of Charles, duke of Burgundy, arrived in Ferrara with a huge entourage of some four hundred men and three hundred and fifty horses.⁹¹ Ercole had shown great honour towards his wife's brother, sending Sigismondo d'Este as far as Lugo, more than a day's ride from Ferrara, to meet him.⁹² During his visit, he was accommodated by Ercole in an apartment above the *Sala Grande*, both which had specially prepared for the occasion:

le quale sala et camera erano maraviosissimamente adornate de pani d'oro et tapezaria, cum una degna credenza in capo de la sala carica de li arzenti del duca, perché se mai al suo tempo, cioè se al tempo de questo duca glorioso, fu mai persona a Ferrara a chi el facesse honore, questo fu a chi l'havea ordinate fare, tanto che più non se potesse fare per lo amore ch'el gli portava [that Hall and the apartment were most marvellously decorated with cloth of gold and tapestries, with a noble credenza at the head of the room, all duke's silver on display, because if in his time, that is in the time of this glorious duke, there was ever anyone in Ferrara to whom he paid such honour, this was he for whom he had it organised, so that more could not have been done out of the love which he (Ercole) bore him (Federico)].⁹³

Ordering that no expense be spared, and that "cibi delicatissimi" [most exquisite foods] and the best wines be served at the banquets which occupied the following days, Ercole entertained the young man and his party for almost a month.⁹⁴ The care and attention which Ercole gave to Federico d'Aragona's visit may be seen as an expression of his

⁹¹ For a list of the party that accompanied Federico to Burgundy; see Simonetta, *Diarii*, 151–52.

⁹² Caleffini, 88.

⁹³ Caleffini, 89.

⁹⁴ Caleffini, 89 and 97.

affection for his young wife, who had already given him one child, and who was again pregnant, hopefully this time with his heir.

It was more than two years later, 7 September 1476, that Carafa wrote to inform Ercole of the final plans for the visit to Ferrara of her younger sister, Beatrice, who was en route to Hungary as the bride of the king, Matthias Corvinus.⁹⁵ Although sections of this letter are badly damaged, it is still possible to read that Beatrice would repeat Eleonora's journey as far as Rome, where she would visit Sixtus, then she would travel across to the port of Manfredonia in order to continue her journey to Ferrara by sea. Caleffini writes that, when news reached Ferrara on 16 October 1476, that the party of Beatrice d'Aragona had reached the coast nearby, the whole court went out to meet her, Eleonora as far as Corbula, a settlement on the Po, some miles to the north-east of the city. From there, Beatrice was escorted on the ducal *bucintoro* to the city walls, where the party changed to horseback, riding through the streets in great triumph to the castle. Ercole rode alongside his sister-in-law beneath a golden baldachino, embellished with the coats of arms of Aragon and Este, Eleonora behind them, her small daughter, Isabella, on the saddle in front of her. When Beatrice left Ferrara to continue her onward journey to Venice, Eleonora travelled with her as far as Corbula and they passed the night together.

There is no information of when it was first suggested that Eleonora might make a return visit to Naples. In his letter of 1 June 1476 Perotto de Vesach had reported to Ercole a conversation he had had with Diomedes Carafa:

Et domandòme che voluntà avea Vostra Signoria de vedere la Maiestà del Signor Re. Io le resposse che assai. Ipso me disse se dio vole che facesse uno figlolo mascolo farrà bene ad venirece perchè yo farrò che con poca spesa sence conducerò perchè ipso senne porrà venire ad uno de quissi soi castelli che stanno in quella marina de Pisa et lo mandariamo le

⁹⁵ Moores, "Diomedes Carafa," 416–17.

galee et in tre dì serria qua. Dice <che> dio ce facesa grazia che possa fare uno figlolo mascolo che ogne cosa venerà bene. [And he asked me how much Your Lordship wanted to see His Majesty the king. I replied that <you did> very much. He said that if God were to provide a male child, you would do well to come here, since I could arrange to bring you here with little expense and since you could come to one of his castles at the port of Pisa and we will send the galleys, so that in three days you will be here. He says that if God were to grant us grace that you can make a male child, then every thing will be fine.]⁹⁶

Ercole's male child had been born, and, having survived the murderous intentions of Niccolò di Leonello, had been baptized, "con grandissima solemnitade" on 13 October 1476.⁹⁷ Although the succession was now comparatively secure, Ercole would not decide to go to Naples himself, but he would agree to send Eleonora in his place. In the following chapter, Eleonora's five-month visit to Naples will be observed through the autograph letters that she wrote to Ercole on a regular basis during that visit. These letters are remarkable for Eleonora's expressions of great sadness at being separated from her husband for so long and for the evidence they present of the deep affection that had blossomed between the couple in the first four years of their marriage. At the same time, while Eleonora was officially in Naples to attend Ferrante's marriage to a Spanish princess, her letters, and those of Ercole's envoy, Cristoforo Rangone, reveal that the visit had a political agenda. Eleonora's expressions of affection for Ercole together with her growing anxiety about her father's real intentions towards him suggest that her visit to Naples saw the beginning of a conflict between her love and loyalty towards her Neapolitan family and that which she owed to her husband and his state. For that reason, Eleonora's letters from Naples are the linchpin of this dissertation, documenting her final and complete transformation from Aragonese princess to Estense consort.

⁹⁶ ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Napoli, busta 1, letter from Perotto de Vesach to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 1 June 1476.

⁹⁷ Zambotti, 22.