Chapter 5

Separation: Eleonora Returns to Naples

Eleonora returned only once to Naples after her marriage to Ercole d’Este. The official reason for this visit, between June and October 1477, was to enable her to attend her father’s second marriage to the young Spanish princess, his niece, Giovanna d’Aragona. The visit was to last for five months as she was already five months’ pregnant with her fourth child when she left Ferrara on 16 May 1477 and was therefore obliged to remain in Naples until after that child was born. The exact nature of the visit is problematic: both the size of her party and the prestige of its members gave it some semblance of a state visit, although there was never any suggestion that Ercole would accompany her. He and his infant heir would remain in Ferrara, while Eleonora took their two small daughters with her. There is also a distinct sense in the letters that Ercole wrote to her in the weeks between her departure from Ferrara and her arrival in Naples that he was fearful that she would not want, or be allowed, to return to Ferrara after Ferrante’s wedding and the birth of her child. The letters that Carafa wrote to Ercole in the month before Eleonora’s departure were also mildly threatening, suggesting that the rift between Ferrante and Ercole over their membership of opposing alliances was too serious for Ercole to feel safe in Naples. Eleonora was therefore going to her father’s court in the guise of a sacrificial lamb, her security in Naples totally dependent on her father’s affection for her.

During the five months that she was in Naples, through a series of letters, laboriously written in her own hand, Eleonora kept Ercole informed about what was
happening at the court and about Ferrante’s involvement in the political crisis in Milan which had dominated the diplomatic scene since the assassination of Galeazzo Sforza on 26 December 1476. These letters were also the vehicle for Eleonora’s frank and intimate expressions of her love for Ercole and of her sadness that they would be apart for so long. Together with several to her from Ercole, these letters will be analysed in this chapter for the evidence they present of the intimacy which had developed between the couple since their marriage some four years earlier, and which was making this separation so painful for both of them. Eleonora’s letters also allow insights into her state of mind on returning to her childhood home and discovering how much she, and her loyalties, had changed in the years since she had left Naples. As she describes her meetings with her father and Diomede Carafa, it also becomes clear how hard Eleonora is working during her visit: to secure a lucrative condotta for Ercole which, along with the balance of her dowry, would help secure his position in Ferrara, and to mediate in the dispute over foreign policy that is driving a wedge between him and her father. That she was unsuccessful in both these aims would become patently obvious within months of her return to Ferrara.

**Background to the visit**

Caleffini reports the arrival in Ferrara on 20 April 1477 of Ferrante’s letter asking Ercole, “che mandasse madama nostra duchessa a Napoli a le sue noze, che volea tore moie sua maestate” [to send Madama, our duchess, to Naples for his marriage celebrations, since His Majesty wished to take a wife].\(^1\) This letter was apparently only a formality, as Eleonora’s brother, Alfonso, had already written to Ercole on 10 April to express his pleasure that “la licencia avite donato ala duchessa che vengha qua a visitare

\[^1\] Caleffini, 244.
la Maestà del Signor Re e me” [you have given the duchess permission to travel here to visit His Majesty the King and me].² The bearer of Alfonso’s letter was to inform Ercole a bocca about Ferrante’s determinations about the route his daughter should take, “per più sua comodità e per essere meglio aconpagniata” [so that she will be more comfortable and better attended]. It would seem that Ferrante had never considered the possibility that Ercole would refuse to allow Eleonora to return to Naples for his wedding, while the birth of his heir and the removal of his main rival in Niccolò di Leonello had apparently given Ercole sufficient confidence to let her go. There was, however, no guarantee that she would be allowed to return.³ Ercole’s decision to join the alliance of Milan, Florence and Venice in 1475 had angered Ferrante, while the stance that Ercole had taken in support of the duchess of Milan after her husband’s death had cut right across Ferrante’s plans to foment discord and increase his own influence in her state.⁴

Eleonora’s Journey to Naples

Ferrante’s concern for the safety and comfort of Eleonora’s journey to Naples would have partly been inspired by his awareness of the increased risks associated with the ongoing political crisis in Milan, which had recently spilled over to include the vassal state of Genoa. Eleonora was also almost five months pregnant with her fourth child

² ASMo, Carteggio Principi Esteri, busta 1246/2, autograph letter from Alfonso, duke of Calabria, to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 10 April [1477].
³ There were precedents for Eleonora’s visit: Barbara of Brandenburg, marchioness of Mantua, returned to her home court only once, in 1442, nine months after the birth of her son and the Gonzaga heir, Federigo; see Swain, 180. Ippolita Maria Sforza, returned to Milan for the wedding of her brother, Duke Galeazzo, leaving Naples in December 1467, six months after the birth of her son, the heir, Ferdinando, prince of Capua, although on that occasion, her husband was in Milan at the same time; see Notar Giacomo, 115; Margaroli, 341; Lubkin, “A Renaissance Court,” 43.
⁴ For the letters that Ercole wrote in February 1477 to his ambassador in Florence, Niccolò Bendidio, about the crisis in Milan; see Riccardo Fubini, “Osservazioni e documenti sulla crisi del ducato di Milano nel 1477 e sulla riforma del Consiglio Segreto Ducale di Bona Sforza,” in Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore, ed. Sergio Bertelli and Gloria Ramakus (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978), 1:47–103 (93–103). In the first of these letters, dated 1 February 1477, Ercole urges Bendidio to be cautious in his discussions with the Neapolitan ambassador, Marino Tomacelli; see Fubini, “Osservazioni”, 94.
when she left Ferrara and she was taking with her two small daughters, Isabella, almost three, and the two-year-old Beatrice. Despite Eleonora’s known fear of the sea, it had been decided that, while she should travel overland as far as Livorno, there she would board one of Ferrante’s galleys for the final part of her journey to Naples.

Caleffini alludes to Eleonora’s popularity with the people of Ferrara, many of whom accompanied her to the city’s port where she boarded the ducal bucentoro with her little daughters and her escort party of some two hundred people. The journey had apparently been considered too perilous for the precious primogenito [first-born son], who was left safely behind in the care of his father and his nurse. Ercole and his brothers, Sigismondo and Rinaldo, travelled with Eleonora as far as Bondeno, before leaving her in the care of some of Ercole’s most trusted courtiers, among whom were included his consigliere segreto [confidential advisor], Cristoforo Rangone da Modena, his cultivated nephew, Niccolò da Correggio, and his personal physician. Geronimo da Castello. Francesco Ariosto was to act as her siniscalco [chief steward], a role which he had fulfilled for many years at the Estense court. As a sign of his concern for her, Ercole had included in her party two men with an intimate knowledge of Ferrante’s court, his two closest Neapolitan companions, Francesco Claveglia and Francesco da Ortona in Mare. Among the members of her own household who travelled with her were Brandelise Trotti, her head chamberlain, and Galeazzo da Canossa, both of whom had been sent to accompany her from Naples four years earlier. All her damiselle [maids-in-waiting] had been “vestite per lo duca de novo” [given new outfits by the duke], and the diarist, Caleffini, estimated that she carried with her 600,000 golden ducats.

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5 Caleffini, 248.  
6 Zambotti, 33.  
7 Caleffini, 24; Diario ferrarese, 81–82.  
8 Caleffini, 247–8. This sum was ten times greater than the dowry granted to her by her father.
Naples on 1 June, the journey accompanied all the way by a frenetic exchange of letters to and from Ferrara and on to Naples.

**A husband’s letters from Ferrara**

For the first part of the journey, the party made use of the rivers and canals which criss-crossed the Estense territories, passing easily from Bondeno to Finale di Modena, then on to Modena, Sassuolo and Castellerano, before embarking on the more arduous overland route through the valleys of the Apennines to the Garfagnana and finally to tiny independent state of Lucca, where she spent two days as a guest of the *Commune* and was visited by Ercole’s ally, Lorenzo de’ Medici. From there she travelled to Livorno where Ferrante’s galleys awaited her.

A small bundle of autograph letters conserved in the *Archivio di Stato* in Modena are those that Ercole wrote to Eleonora immediately after they parted at Bondeno and in the days thereafter, and consigned to couriers who carried them to wherever the party stopped for the night. While it cannot be known how many of the letters that Ercole wrote actually reached Eleonora, as her replies during the journey no longer exist, but those that did reach her along the route and in Naples returned with her to Ferrara to become part of the family archive. All are autograph, written in a spidery, sloping hand that is often difficult to decipher.

The first of Ercole’s autograph letters to Eleonora bears the date 17 May 1477, the day after she departed from Ferrara. This letter is remarkable for his apparently

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9 Caleffini, 194, n. 4. Eleonora spent two days in Lucca, where she was entertained “honorifice publico sumptu” [honorably from the public purse] at a cost of 1336 florins plus “sei libbre e un’ancia di taffeta bianco” [6 lb 1 oz of white taffeta]; see Luigi Volpicella and Eugenio Lazzareschi, *La signoria di Lucca alle nozze di Ferdinando I di Napoli con Giovanna d’Aragona*, Nozze Bondi–Marchi, Lucca, 23 aprile 1914 (Lucca: Tipografia Editrice Baron, 1914), 50.

10 Ercole’s letters of 18 and 20 May and 2 June refer to replies from Eleonora that do not survive.

11 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Ferrara, 17 May 1477.
genuine expressions of emotion at their separation. Addressing his wife with the familiar, “Madama amantissima” [Most loving Madama], Ercole blamed the emotion he had felt at their parting for his failure to ask her to commend him to her father and her brother, insisting that this was not “per dementiganza ma avendo el core sì restreto e tristo non averia potuto dire una sola parola” [due to forgetfulness, but due to having a heart so constricted and sad that I could not have said a single word]. This is an extraordinary admission for a man known for his reserve, and would appear to be completely genuine. However, he quickly recovered his composure, requesting that, “quando seriti ala presencia de’ Signor Re me arecomandati ala Sua Maestà con tutta quello offecto ve sarà possibile, perché non mancho abia mo a desponere de questo stato e de nui tuti quanto del suo proprio” [when you are in the presence of the king, you may commend me to His Majesty with as much affection as will be possible for you, because he can make use of me and my state just as if they were his own]. His next words revealed that they had discussed his relationship with Ferrante before she left and that he had entrusted her with the task of trying to smooth things over with her father: “sapiti lo animo mio sopra ciò, supliriti con queste poche parole tanto como se vene impressa tuta questa carta” [you know my thoughts on that, and you will flesh out these few words just as much as if the whole page were covered with them]. Voicing the possibility that she would not want, or be able, to return to him at the end of her visit, he employed the gentle persuasion of a proverb to suggest that their marriage would only get better after this separation: “recordative de tornare presto ché ve prometo che l’è ben vero quello proverbio che dize che se le cossè se fazesero doe volte se fariano tuto bene” [remember to come back soon, because I promise you that the proverb is quite true that says that if things are done twice they are done really well]. Then, revealing how concerned he was for her welfare during the journey: “ho deliberato mandare
Angello Saltarello con vui fino che entrati in galea aziò ve veda intrare e poi subito torni et me sapia bene informare como ve seriti bene comportata per questo camino” [I have decided to send Angelo Saltarello with you as far as the galley, so that he will see you board and then immediately he will return and be able to keep me well informed about how well you’ve been during this journey]. Angelo Saltarello da Napoli, yet another Neapolitan member of Ercole’s household, was listed as his “scudero” [squire] in the list of salariati of 1476.\(^{12}\)

Writing again the following day and revealing that he had already received two letters from her, one from Ca’ de Coppi along the River Po and the other from Modena, he alluded to her expressions of sadness at their separation, feelings that he too shared: “credo che ’l ve rencresa non me posiate vedere como solevati perché quello medesimo fà a me e molto più” [I believe that you are sad that you cannot see me as you usually do, because it’s the same for me and more so], begging her to take good care of herself and to keep safe:

> Atenditi più a star sana e fative portare cum mancho periculo che pottiti, perché non potrisi mi far cossa che più me piazesse. Io me sforzarò de far el simile e poi che la pacie hé fata, bevemo questo calize. [Make sure you keep well and that you are conducted with as little danger as possible, because you could do nothing which would please me more. I will force myself to do the same, and then when peace is made in Milan, let us drink this toast.]\(^{13}\)

Although Eleonora had been away for only one day, his closing words were plaintive: “Arecordative pur tornare presto” [Just remember to come back soon]. These are not merely the formulaic expressions of a dutiful husband, but the heart-felt words of a man who genuinely loves his wife, who fears for her welfare while they are apart, and even

\(^{12}\) Caleffini, p.149. A sign of his favour with Ercole was the gold chain worth 70 ducats which the duke presented to him in December 1474; see Caleffini, p.91.

\(^{13}\) ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Ferrara, 18 May 1477.
wonders if she will be allowed to return to him at all. This little autograph letter gives
the first intimation of the affection that had developed between the couple during their
first four years together, affection that would make this separation so painful for both of
them.

In his third letter to Eleonora three days later, Ercole acknowledged two that he
had received from her, expressing his happiness that the journey had so far gone without
mishap. However, he was anxious because she was about to transfer to horseback for
the hazardous journey through the mountains to the Garfagnana, “sto con desiderio
sentire abiati pasati l’alpe a salvamento” [I am waiting to hear that you have crossed
the mountains safely]. He was sending her copies of the letters of recommendation that he
had written for her to give to Ferrante and to the duke of Calabria, “parendomi che non
fusti andata cusi bene senza qualche mia lettera” [since it seems to me that you should
not have gone without some letters from me], although she should decide whether to
deliver them or not. Of their little son with him in Ferrara he wrote, “Alfonso sta bene
dio gracia” [Alfonso is well, thanks be to God], and referring for the first time to the
two little girls travelling with their mother: “bassati Issabella e Beatrice da mia parte’
[kiss Isabella and Beatrice for me]. In a postscript, he added he had also attached a letter
(of recommendation?) for Diomede Carafa, but suggested that he would leave it up to
her to decide whether it should be sent on ahead of her to Naples.

On 2 June 1477 Ercole wrote to say that Angelo Saltarello had returned to
Ferrara with a letter from her, and that the squire had told him about “lo honore e careze
ve sono state fate” [the honour and affection you have received] along the way. As
several of his letters had apparently missed her stops for the night, “a la zunta a Napuli

14 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to
Eleonora d’Aragona, Ferrara, 20 May 1477.
15 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to
Eleonora d’Aragona, Ferrara, 2 June 1477.
averiti trovato tante lettere che ve serano venuto in fastidio” [when you arrive in Naples you will find so many letters that it will be a nuisance for you]. Raising the matter of the crisis in Milan for the first time, he had already written to her about the flight of Roberto da San Severino and the Sforza brothers after their failed coup attempt but knew nothing more, and as she should already be in Naples by now, “da messer Antonio el Signor Re sarà primo avisato e per quella via potriti sapere quanto seguirà” [the King will be advised before anyone else by Messer Antonio and you will be able to find out by way of him what will happen next].

This letter reveals that this was never meant to be a restful visit for Eleonora, and that it had been decided well before she set out that she would be using her presence in Naples to act as Ercole’s agent with her father in Naples, keeping him informed about Ferrante’s latest decisions about the situation in Milan. Again, revealing that he feared she would not be allowed to return, he closed with the rather plaintive entreaty: “non ve scordati de nui altri de qua” [don’t forget us all here].

Ercole’s letter of 6 June 1477 was full of the news of the imminent betrothal of their son Alfonso, not yet one year old, to Anna Sforza, the infant daughter of the duchess of Milan, a parentado that was a confirmation of the triple alliance and well received by Venice and Florence. Referring to the duchess of Milan’s decision to banish her brother-in-law because of their opposition to her regency, he believed that: “essendo seguiti quisti inconvenienti, non se potria portare madama de Milano più umanamente” [because these disturbances have ensued, Madama <the duchess> of Milan could not act more humanely]. Then, revealing that he had not yet heard whether

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16 Antonio Cicinello, Ferrante’s special ambassador in Milan.
17 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Ferrara, 6 June 1477. Alfonso was born on 21 July 1476, and Anna two days earlier on 19 July 1476. Their marriage, and that of Beatrice d’Este to Ludovico Sforza, would take place in January 1491, and Anna died in childbirth with her first child in 1497; see Guido Lopez, Festa di nozze per Ludovico il Moro: fasti nuziali eintrighi di potere alla corte degli Sforza, tra Milano, Vigevano e Ferrara, 2nd ed. (Milan: Mursia, 2008).
Eleonora had arrived safely in Naples: “Sto con desiderio aspettandole e specialmente che siati arrivati sana e salva” [I’m anxiously waiting for them <her letters> and especially <for news that> you have arrived safe and sound].

He still had not heard from her when he wrote again on 10 June 1477, his sense of offence becoming obvious:

Per non guastare la mia determinazione cioè de scrivere spesso a la Signoria Vostra, ve scrivo la presente non già che fino a questa hora io abia receputo vostre lettere da poi partisti da Liorno, ma pur dubitando che el vento contrario ve abia retardato he che per questo siati più tardo iunta a Napoli [In order not to weaken my determination, that is to write often to Your Ladyship, I am writing you the present letter <although> up until this time I have not yet received letters from you since you left Livorno, yet fearing that a contrary wind has delayed you and that for this reason you have reached Naples much later].

Ercole’s impatience at not hearing from Eleonora raises the question of his insecurity about the strength of her affection for him as she was about to revisit the world of her childhood. Rather than expressing his concern that some mishap had befallen her ship, he suggested that she had forgotten him already since, “tanti fuse li piaciri che avisti in quele parte che al tuto ve avisti dismentigato nui altri di qua” [such have been the pleasures which you are having in those parts that you have completely forgotten all of us here]. Then, leaving her with a forlorn image of himself, he complained: “tutavia se sta aspetando he non pasa chavallo per la strata che io non mando avedere se hè cavalaro on curiero che porti vostre lettere” [anyway, I’m <still> waiting and no horse passes by on the road without me sending someone to see if it is a courier or a messenger carrying your letters]. Then, returning to the politics of the day with the news that Ludovico and Ascanio Sforza would be passing through Ferrara any day soon on their way to separate exiles in Florence and Siena, and acknowledging the despair that

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18 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1652, busta 67, autograph letter from Ercole d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, Ferrara, 10 June 1477.
her sister-in-law, Ippolita Maria Sforza, would be feeling at the disasters that had so recently befallen her family, he begged Eleonora to assure her that “a li fratelli, quando serano qui, farò tute quelle careze che più me serano posibile” [when her brothers come here, I will show them all possible affection].

While there are textual references to later letters written by Ercole to Eleonora during her time in Naples, none of these has survived. Now it would be Eleonora who would begin to write her letters to him, revealing that, far from forgetting him, she was enjoying their separation even less than he was.

**Letters from friends and family in Naples**

Eleonora had reached Naples on 1 June 1477, her arrival and her entry into the city described by the diarist, Notar Giacomo:

> Al primo del predicto mese et anno venne per mare da ferrara innapoli la illustre Madamma Dianora de aragonia gravida consorte dello illustre Signore Hercules Duca de ferrara et smontò al castello dell’ovo et lo seguente di intrò innapoli con gran triumpho la quale la portava per la mano lo predicto Serenissimo Re Ferrando suo patre et dismontò ad lo castello de Capuana [On the first of that month and year the Illustrious Madama Dianora d’Aragona, the pregnant wife of the Illustrious Lord Ercole duke of Ferrara, came by sea to Naples, and landed at the Castel dell’Ovo, and the following day she entered Naples in great triumph, the Most Serene King Ferrante, her father, leading her by the hand, and she dismounted at Castel Capuano].

The Castel Capuano was the home of the duke and duchess of Calabria, where it appears Eleonora stayed with her two daughters during her visit to Naples. Fittingly, it was Alfonso, the duke of Calabria, who on 4 June 1477 wrote a most charming letter

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19 Another of Ippolita Maria’s brothers, Ottaviano Sforza, had drowned when trying to cross the Adda River while escaping from Milan; see Caleffini, 250. Caleffini writes that Ercole was true to his promise to Ippolita Maria, going some miles outside Ferrara to meet her brothers, before entertaining them in Ferrara; see Caleffini, 249–50.

20 Notar Giacomo, 134. Eleonora was often referred to affectionately as Dionora in Naples; see the diarist, Passero’s entry, below, 253.
to Ercole in his own hand, expressing his happiness at having his sister and her
daughters with him in Naples:

Vostra Signoria lo pò considerare, e specialmente che siano ionte sane e polite, che certo, amando dicta duchessa e figliole, non como sora e nepute, ma como propri figli, le desideravo molto vedere per possere pigliare alguno di consolacione con loro, tanto più me è stata cara loro venuta per avere enteso da la dicta duchessa el grande amore e comportamento Vostro Signoria li fa che certo non [n]de fui mai in dubio, de che tanto la Maiestà del Signor Re quanto ancora io multo ve rengraciamo e restamo obligate [Your Lordship can imagine, especially now that they have reached here safe and sound and sparkling, how much I, who love the duchess and her daughters, not as sister and nieces, but as my own children, desired to see them so that I can to take some pleasure from them, and their coming here has been all the more dear to me for having heard from the duchess Your Lordship’s great love and fine conduct towards her, of which I was certainly never in any doubt, for which His Majesty the King, as much as I myself, thank you and remain obliged to you].

Eleonora appears to have wasted no time telling her family about the “grande amore e comportamento” that Ercole has shown her, causing even her less-than-sentimental brother to emerge from his formulaic expressions of gratitude to her husband in order to marvel at his affectionate treatment of his sister. Her brother’s letter gives some validation of the emotions which Eleonora will herself express in her letters to Ercole, a clear indication that affection in marriage – even a dynastic marriage – was no less important than fine conduct.

Then, turning to the three-year-old Isabella, who was already showing signs of having her mother’s affectionate nature, having charmed everyone at the court:

Non me maraveglio mente per avere inteso le carege fate a 'Sabella vostra figlia, perché è tale che lo merita, e ve dirò da vero senza le gocteria mai vidi la più gentili creatura, pensate se sta demestica con tucte como se fosse allevata qua [It doesn’t surprise me to have heard of the affection lavished on Isabella your daughter, since she is such a one

21 ASMo, Carteggio Principi Esteri, 1246, busta 2, autograph letter from Alfonso, duke of Calabria, to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 4 June 1477.
who deserves it, and I’ll tell you truthfully without joking I never saw a more lovely creature. Think that she is friends with everybody as if she had been raised here].

Ercole’s letters of commendation for Eleonora, of which he had written after she left Ferrara, had been well received, Alfonso acknowledging with great generosity of spirit that the sentiments expressed, “procedeno piú da grande amore li portate che da bisogno perché site certo, essendo qua in casa dela dicta Maestà e mia, è in casa vostra e sua” [come more from the great love you bear her than from necessity, because you are certain that here, when she is in His Majesty’s and my house, she is in your house and her own]. Alfonso suggested that he would be leaving within the week to collect Ferrante’s bride from Catalonia.22

At a less personal level, however, relations between Naples and Ferrara remained tense. Carafa had written two letters to Ercole in April 1477, although in them he did not once raise the subject of Eleonora’s impending visit to Naples. The main topic of both letters had been the rebellion against Milanese rule in Genoa, with Carafa refuting suggestions that Ferrante, who had already been suspected of provoking an earlier revolt in Genoa in 1476, had promised to send part of his fleet to the aid of the rebels.23 On 8 April 1477, Carafa insisted that Ferrante was more concerned that other (foreign) powers would become involved in Genoa: “Foria tanto peio che quelli per desperacione se boctassero in altre mane. Dio se nde quarde!”[It would be so much worse that those people, out of desperation, threw themselves into the hands of others. God forbid!].24

In fact, Ferrante had been pleased to hear that “la Signoria Vostra aia comparso con li

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22 Alfonso had left Naples on 11 June 1477, sailing along the coast, calling in at Rome, Piombino, Pisa, Monaco and Nice, before reaching Barcelona on 25 July after weathering a huge storm in Gulf of Narbona; see Notar Giacomo, 134–35.
23 Moores, “Diomede Carafa,” 293
24 Moores, “Diomede Carafa,” 420–21. In his analysis of the diplomatic manoeuvering of Ferrante and Lorenzo de’ Medici during the Genoa crisis, Fubini suggests that these “altre mane” referred to the French, “con cui Venezia si apprestava ad entrara in trattativa di lega” [with whom Venice was getting ready to enter into negotiations for a league], adding that “anche Lorenzo teneva d’occhio le vicende oltremontane” [Lorenzo too was keeping his eye on events beyond the Alps]; see Medici, Lettere, 2:347.
fante ad quelle de Milano” [Your Lordship turned up with infantry in support of those
Milanesi], although he himself was sending galleys to Genoa, because, in the words of
the truism, “Se intende ad prendere de li male partite lo men male” [We’re trying to
make the best of a bad lot].

Carafa opened his letter to Ercole, dated 11 April 1477, revealing that Giovanni
d’Aragona’s elevation to the cardinalate was imminent, but urging secrecy at this
stage.25 Having hoped to win Ercole’s confidence with that suggestion of intimacy,
Carafa then returned to the news from Genoa, insisting that Ferrante was happy about
what was happening there and that Ercole should not believe everything he heard. There
was a sense of threat in the count’s closing words: “et de questo de credete ad me,
quando altro ve nde fosse dicto, <che> questo essere lo evangelio” [and believe me about
this, even if you were told something else, that this is the gospel truth].26 Carafa’s
outburst suggests that Ercole was in a most difficult position in relation to Ferrante, not
wishing to alienate him completely in view of Eleonora’s imminent visit to Naples, but
bound by his membership of the triple alliance to oppose what Ferrante was trying to do
to Milan. His familial ties with Ferrante are fast becoming a noose around his own neck,
particularly when the king attempts to cast himself in the role of “a responsible Italian
prince acting for the good of all Italy.”27

25 Moores, “Diomede Carafa,” 421–22. The twenty-one-year-old prelate’s elevation was made official
in Sixtus’s consistory of 12 December 1477, and his cardinal’s hat was delivered to Naples three months
later.
26 Moores suggests that Ercole had heard rumours that Ferrante was plotting to let the French into Genoa
and that he had accused him accordingly; see Moores, “Diomede Carafa,” 296.
27 Ilardi comments on Ferrante’s failure to assume the mantle of Francesco Sforza, the architect of he
Italian League; see Ilardi, “Towards the Tragedia d’Italia,” 121. It is in this context that Ilardi quotes
Ferrante’s sarcastic comment on being informed about the formation of the new alliance of Florence,
Milan and Venice in 1474: “che assay gli piaceva questa liga facta perché, essendo luy vero italiano Re,
non gli puo né deve se non grandemente piacere tutte quelle cose che tendano ad la conservazione de la
pace italica, quale è questa liga” [that he liked this league which had been forged a lot since, being a real
Italian king, all those things which pertain to the preservation of the peace of Italy, such as this league,
can and should only please him greatly] (Maletta to Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Naples, 29 July 1475); see
Ilardi, “Towards the Tragedia d’Italia,” 121, n. 110.
Carafa next wrote two letters to Ercole, both dated 3 June 1477, in the first of which he expressed his happiness about the marriage alliance between Alfonso d’Este and Anna Sforza, suggesting that the duke of Calabria would have a letter written to the duchess of Milan, “multo alegrandose de tale matrimonio” [rejoicing greatly in that marriage].\(^\text{28}\) Almost as an afterthought, Carafa mentioned the arrival of Eleonora in Naples, commenting on her fortitude in withstanding the hardships of the journey: “Ben ve dico che ey tanto arivata bene che uno homo d’arme non l’avere passato lo viayo che à facto con tanta rebosteza che non pare s’è mossa de uno” [I must tell you that she has arrived so well that a soldier would not have endured the journey (better) because she has made it with such stamina that it appears that she hasn’t moved an inch].

In his second letter of 3 June 1477, Carafa went quickly to the subject that Ercole most wanted to know about:\(^\text{29}\)

Avisando Vostra Signoria che fui lo primo (che) lo disse ad Madama, che io avea avute due mazze et piege de lettere ante (che) essa arivasse. Et subito (che) me vede me domandò se io avea littere de la Signoria Vostra. Io li risposse che de tenea una somma. Che non dommandate como stava desiderosa de dicte littere! [I advise Your Lordship that the first thing I said to Madama was that I’ve had two bundles and piles of letters before she arrived. And immediately she saw me she asked if I had letters from Your Lordship. I replied that I had a whole load. Don’t ask me how happy she was for those letters!]

This confirmed Ercole’s earlier suggestion that there would be so many letters from him waiting for her in Naples that she would find it difficult to read them all. Carafa assured him that Eleonora had lost none of her popularity with her family and friends: “In verità, Signore, (dico) che ave alegrato tucto quisto paese” [Truly My Lord, I say that she has delighted everyone in this town], as had his little daughters, “che pare (che) vengano dal paradiso” [who seem to have come from Paradise]. Carafa closed his letter, alluding to the amazing effect that Eleonora’s presence has had on the duke of Calabria.


and her father: “Lo Signor duca non à saputo saciare honorar Madama, et anco lo Signor Re d’à facta più demostracione che la sua natura èy solita” [The duke hasn’t been able to get enough of honouring Madama, and even the king has made more demonstration of affection that is normal for his nature]. I believe that Carafa’s reference to the softening effect that Eleonora has had upon her brother and her father in the brief period since her arrival in Naples is confirmation of previous suggestions that her charming and affectionate nature was infectious in its effect on others.

An autograph letter written by Ferrante to Ercole, dated 10 June 1477, although in bad condition, makes interesting reading because of the king’s apparently sincere feelings of affection towards his son-in-law.30 Addressing Ercole with the familiar “Illustrissimo duca mio caro figlio” [Most Illustrious duke, my dear son], Ferrante’s use of the singular personal pronoun, “io”, rather than the royal plural, “noi”, confirms the intended intimacy of his letter. He first thanked Ercole for his letter of commendation of Eleonora, in which the duke had asked his father-in-law to take special account of the length of time she would have to remain in Naples, especially because of her pregnancy. The remainder of Ferrante’s letter was a grateful acknowledgement of Ercole’s kindness towards his beloved daughter:

Mi have piacuto lo abiate facto che tanto più conoscho lo bene volite che hè quello desider’io, per ben che essa de vui tanto se lauda che più dire non saperìa e, se me have piacuto vederla, questa parte de havere da lei tanto inteso deli portamenti, le facte sono state non meno che de tucto ve ne rengratio quale in veritate tucta me havevo dato puro assai contentamento [I am pleased that you have acted in such a way that I know all the more that you love her, which is all that I can wish for, although she praises you more than she can possibly say, it has pleased me to see her, this part of having heard from her so much about your treatment of her has been no less, and for this in truth I thank you because it has made me very happy].

30 ASMo, Cancelleria estense, Estero, Carteggio di Principi e Signorie, Naples–Sicily, busta 1, autograph letter from Ferrante I of Naples to Ercole d’Este, 10 June 1477, damaged.
In this short letter to his son-in-law, Ferrante provides further confirmation of the mutual affection which had grown between his daughter and her husband since their marriage. The king’s gratitude that the politically-convenient marriage to which he had consigned his daughter has been happy, and that her husband has treated her with such love and consideration, surely reflects the concern of any father knowing that such marriages could be sad, loveless affairs. The ever present reminder of that possibility was the notoriously difficult relationship between his son, Alfonso, duke of Calabria, and his wife, Ippolita Maria Sforza, about which Eleonora herself would comment early in one of her first letters to Ercole. Ferrante’s obvious delight at having his daughter back with him in Naples also confirms Niccolò Contrari’s observation at the wedding in 1473 that, “la Maiestà del Re fa una gran demonstration de l’amor che’l porta a questa sua fiolla Duchesa de Ferara ad miracion a tuti” [His Majesty the King makes a great show of the love he bears towards his daughter, the Duchess of Ferrara, to the admiration of all]. Clearly happy that, for the moment at least, he and his son-in-law can agree on one thing, the love they both feel for Eleonora, Ferrante’s affection for his daughter would later be sorely tested as she increasingly showed that her loyalties now lay with her husband.

**Homesick letters from Naples**

The letters which Eleonora wrote to Ercole from Naples in 1477 are the first examples of a carteggio of some three hundred letters, now conserved in the Archivio di Stato in Modena. More significantly, the letters from Naples are all in Eleonora’s own hand, the only surviving examples of her autograph letters. Although only twelve of these letters remain from what was apparently a much larger correspondence, their importance far
outweighs their number because they represent the first, and only, time that Eleonora’s own voice is heard.\(^{31}\)

The fact that she was choosing to write these letters in her own hand, eschewing the services of her own trusted “cancellero” [secretary], Vicenzo di Lardi, who had travelled with her to Naples,\(^{32}\) suggests that she, like Margherita Datini in her letters to her husband some three-quarters of a century earlier, considered their contents to be both too personal and too sensitive for the eyes of a third person.\(^{33}\) The poor quality of her handwriting, with its cramped and ill-formed letters, suggests that writing did not come easily to Eleonora.\(^{34}\) At the end of her first letter to Ercole, Eleonora herself revealed that its single page had taken her two days to write, leaving her little time for anything else. It was obviously an onerous task, but one which she clearly performed out of love for him, and a strong sense of duty towards him and his state. Initially almost fortnightly, but becoming less frequent as her pregnancy advanced, Eleonora’s letters from Naples are remarkable above all for the emotions – affection, sadness, anxiety, homesickness and anticipation – that she expresses in the most human of terms. After taking into account the admonitions of such epistolary experts as Shemek, Bryce and James, that a distinction must always be made between emotional expressions that are genuine and those that are dictated by current letter-writing conventions, it will be argued that Eleonora’s expressions of the pain she is experiencing at being separated from a man she has grown to love and respect, and whose state she has decided to

\(^{31}\) In the letters which he wrote to her immediately after she left Ferrara, Ercole refers to several from her which appear to be lost. The same applies to Ercole’s letters to Naples which cease after 10 June 1477.

\(^{32}\) Caleffini, 248. Vicenzo di Lardi da Ferrara is also listed by Caleffini as Eleonora’s secretary in the famiglia that Ercole sent to accompany her from Naples in 1473; see Caleffini, 40.

\(^{33}\) Crabb, “If I could write,” 1172.

\(^{34}\) This had been commented upon by her father in his letter of 29 July 1473, while, in September 1478, Ercole’s secretary, Paolo Antonio Trotti would beg her not write to him in her own hand, because “non le posso leggere senza lacrime per forma che porto grandissima pena a leggerle” [I cannot read them without weeping, as they are extremely difficult to read]; see ASMo, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Florence, busta 1, letter from Paolo Antonio Trotti to Eleonora d’Aragona, Florence, 7 September 1478.
accept as her own, come from her heart and not from contemporary epistolary rhetoric.

The political situation in Milan is a constant backdrop to Eleonora’s more personal accounts of life at her father’s court. It soon becomes apparent from her letters that she is being pressured by Ferrante and Diomede Carafa to convince Ercole to follow their directives in his dealings with the duchess of Milan. It is also clear that Ercole has no intention of changing his own stance on Milan. This leaves Eleonora in the invidious position of openly opposing the two people who had been so much a part of her life before her marriage and to whom she owed the greatest respect and loyalty. Her discomfort is palpable as she realizes how much she and her loyalties have changed during her marriage to Ercole d’Este.

Eleonora’s first letter to Ercole was written on 4 June 1477, three days after she arrived in Naples, although she explained that she had already had a letter written to him containing “tucto lo generale” [all the general news], possibly by the secretary who had accompanied her to Naples, Vicenzo di Lardi. The letter on which she was now embarking was clearly too intimate to be committed to a scribe, however trusted that man was. She insisted that, despite his anxiety that he had not received a letter from her for so many days, there was no way that she could have forgotten him, “che tquesto non seria possibile quanno io ben volesse” [for this would not be possible even if I really wanted to]. Her pleasure had been great at finding a letter from him on her arrival in Naples, “ché me parea mille anne non avea avuta vostra lectera” [because it seemed to me ages since I had received a letter from you]. However, from that letter she had also learned of Ercole’s displeasure at a reply he had received from Ferrante, probably

35 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1683, busta 131, autograph letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 4 June 1477. For a philological study of this letter; see Tina Matarrese, “Ferrarese e napoletano nelle lettere di Eleonora d’Aragona,” in Lingue e culture dell’Italia meridionale, ed. Paolo Trovato (Rome: Bonacci, 1993), 203–08 (204–05). I follow Matarrese in transcribing Eleonora’s characteristic redundant t with the consonantal group that follows it.
reflecting their diverging views on the situation in Milan, telling him not to take it to heart, because her father had thought better of it and the matter appeared to have been resolved, “sitché dela allegreza ne ò avuto io la deite etstimare” [so that you just have to imagine the joy that I have taken from it]. She has clearly been upset at finding serious differences between the two men so early in her visit: “preo Nostro Signor Dio sia facta a la bona ora et con salute dell’anima et de lo corpo et contenteza de tucte le parte” [I pray to our Lord God that it will be done soon, for the salvation of the soul and the body, and the contentment of all parties]. Eleonora attempted to describe her confused feelings about being back in Naples, joy that she was back among her family and that their love for her was apparently unchanged, but sorrow that she and Ercole must be apart:

Io voglio la Signoria Vostra satpia che atg〈io trovato el Signor Re tanto bene ditsposto envere de nui quanto sia possibele et non poterissevo credere le carize che mme fa Soa Maestà et tucte mei fratelli et onne altro, che tcerto, Signor mio, onne ora me trovo più contenta di essere qua, ma per non vedere la Signoria Vostra, non poterissevo credere quanto so’ venut〈a〉 in fatstidio de tstare aquà [I want Your Lordship to know that I have found the King as well disposed to us as is possible and you wouldn’t believe the affection shown to me by His Majesty, all my brothers and everyone else, so that certainly, My Lord, every hour I find myself happier to be here, but, because I’m not seeing Your Lordship, you couldn’t believe how sick I am of being here].

She had observed and appreciated the difficult situation in which her sister-in-law, Ippolita Maria Sforza, had found herself in Naples, as the sister of the murdered Galeazzo Sforza, having to stand by and watch while her family imploded and while the future of Milan was being decided by others. But she, unlike Eleonora, did not have a wonderful husband like Ercole to support her in her distress, referring her brother’s notoriously unhappy marriage, which was at least in part due to his own sexual
infidelities. Eleonora could not help comparing the problems of that marriage with the blissfully happy state of her own: “et volerio che vedissevo quando io le dico dela vita che ttenimo insieme, la invidia che ave Madama la duchessa! Sitché io concrudo la Signoria Vostra essere deli buone marite de Italia” [I wish you could see when I tell her about our life together, how envious Madama the duchess is! Therefore I’ve come to the conclusion that Your Lordship is one of the best husbands in Italy].

Immediately after this reference to her libidinous brother, Eleonora voiced her own fear that Ercole would not be able to remain faithful to her in her absence: “si mme rencrese che per mia partita atbiate at fare qualche tpeccato, ma io son certa me osservarite la promessa” [I am therefore full of regret that, because of my departure, you may find yourself committing some sin, but I am sure that you will keep your promise to me].

The thought that this might happen while she was away apparently caused her such distress that voiced the possibility that Ercole might be able to find some reason for her to return to Ferrara:

Ma, Signor mio, io voleria venesse de qualche bona scusa che mme ’nde avesse da retornare, ché per niente non posso stare tanto qua senza vui, et se ve ’nde pare qualche buono mezo, non lo lassate a tdirlo per la mia pie neza, neanche per la spesa, ché a tucto ène remedie. [But, My Lord, I wish you would come up with some good excuse for me to return, because I just cannot stay here for so long without you, and if you can find some good way, don’t refrain from saying it on account of my pregnancy nor of the expense, for there is a remedy for everything].

36 Welch writes that, by 1473, Alfonso’s favourite mistress was living with them in Castel Capuano; see Evelyn Welch, “Between Milan and Naples: Ippolita Maria Sforza, duchess of Calabria,” in The French Descent into Renaissance Italy 1494–95: Antecedents and Effects, ed. David Abulafia (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995): 127–35 (130). Lubkin refers to a letter, dated 1 November 1473, from Francesco Maletta in Naples to Galeazzo Sforza, in which he refers to Alfonso’s immoderate sexual appetites which render him unable to “restrain himself from coitus, as much with women as with men”; see Lubkin, 202 and 348, n. 81.

37 During Eleonora’s absence, Ercole did have a relationship with one of her ladies-in-waiting, Isabella Arduino, sometime around July 1477. This lady was conveniently married off and her son, who would be known as Giulio d’Este, was born three months later, in March 1478. Eleonora brought this boy up with her own children; see Caleffini, 290. This is Ercole’s only reported infidelity during his marriage to Eleonora; see Gardner, 151.
After this emotional outburst, Eleonora quickly changed tack, revealing that she had already been hard at work finding out what her brother and Ferrante were feeling about the situation in Milan, in order that she might keep up-to-date. The king had decided to send the duke of Urbino to Milan to support the duchess, but “a tmadama la duchessa non le piace njente et si è dello parere vostro” [the Duchess of Calabria does not like it at all and shares your opinion]. She also revealed that she was still very reliant on Carafa for her information: “Io non ò possuto sapere particolarmente onnen cosa perché lo conte non se à sentito trotpo bene, ma como le pozo parlare saverò” [I have not been able to find out in detail about everything because the count has not been feeling too well, but, as soon as I can speak to him, I shall know].

Carafa had, however, been well enough to write two letters to Ercole the day before Eleonora’s letter, so that it would seem that he was hiding behind his indisposition to avoid discussing Ferrante’s policy initiatives with her.38 When Carafa next wrote to Ercole on 13 June 1477, after discussing Alfonso’s departure to collect Ferrante’s bride,39 he revealed that Eleonora had not stopped talking about her life with “her duke” since her arrival in Naples:

Ben ve dico che mai persona al mondo se vede laudarse de un’altra como essa fa de la Signoria Vostra de onne cosa et de tante carize che le farite; in modo che mai parla de altro. Et ve dico che li fratelli la burlano con essa dicendli che mai parla de altro che de lo duca suo. [I assure you that no one in the world is praised by another as is Your Lordship by her, for everything you do and for the many signs of affection, so that she never speaks of anything else. And I’ll tell you that her brothers tease her, saying that she never speaks of anyone but her duke.]

These are surely not the formulaic utterances of a professional courtier, but Carafa’s rather bemused acknowledgement of Eleonora’s all-consuming passion for Ercole and

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38 These letters are discussed above; See 238–40.
her life with him in Ferrara. Next, it was the turn of the tiny Isabella, his god-daughter, and her exceptional qualities:

Non dirò altro de Madama per dire de Donna Isabella, mia figlyana. Certo non me pare <che> aiate facto poco avere ve nde spesato, che alla mia fantasia la seme figliola non èy al mondo. So bene io <che> mai tale la vide et de belleza et de modi, dio vella quarde che certo ey uno ioello. [I won’t say any more about Madama so that I can speak about Donna Isabella, my god-daughter. It certainly seems to me that you have done no small thing in having separated yourself from her, for in my fantasy there is no other girl like her in the world. I am sure that I have never seen someone with such beauty and such manners, may God preserve her, for she certainly is a jewel.]

Then, with uncanny accuracy, Carafa predicted that the fate of Isabella’s younger sister, Beatrice, was either to be ignored completely or to be compared unfavourably with her sister for the rest of her life:

Non dico <che> Dona Biatrice sia da acompararella ad essa, ma mende aveano dicto tanto che non era bella, che m’à parso altramente che non era la fama, et che fazo de essa pronostico che sarrà una donna de grande animo et da comandare [I don’t say that Donna Beatrice is to be compared with her, but having been told so much that she was not pretty, I disagreed with this reputation, and I predict that she will be a woman of great spirit and authority]40

Eleonora’s next letter to Ercole, written on 13 June 1477, is badly damaged, although it appears to contain little but news of the continuing crisis in Milan.41 She had received letters from Ercole and expressed her happiness that both he and little Alfonso were well, assuring him that she and the little girls were also well, “ma multe meglio se fossemo at <Fe>rara” [but we would be much better if we were in Ferrara]. She revealed that Ferrante’s special envoy, Antonio Cicinello, had given them all the latest news on Milan, but that Ferrante was unhappy that the duchess had banished her

40 Moores suggests that “her ugliness lay principally in the fact that she was not a boy”; see Moores, “Diomede Carafa,” 313.
41 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1683, busta 131, autograph letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 13 June 1477.
brothers-in-law and Roberto da Sanseverino. Obviously at her father’s bidding,
Eleonora suggested to Ercole that he should: “consigliate alla duchessa che se intenda
bene con lo Signor Re che ffa<ce>sse” [advise the duchess to take advice from the king
about what to do], assuring him that, for the moment at least: “per nui è certo che Soa
Maestà ce n’è molto bene disposto per confermare de quillo stato, et non per altro che
per lo duca” [we are quite certain that His Majesty is very well disposed to confirm
that state, and purely on account of the duke].42 As she ended her letter, Eleonora’s
business-like demeanour dissolved, revealing the sense of isolation she was
experiencing in Naples:

Signor mio, ve suplico me mandate quale che deli vostri cortesane per posserme parlare
con isso de cose nove de Signoria Vostra, che tcon quiste che stanno aquí sonno viece et
non me fanno de niente et mandatemelo presto che mme serà uno grande spasso” [My
Lord, I beg you to send me one of your courtiers so that I can speak with him of what’s
new with Your Lordship because those here are old and do nothing for me, and send him
to me quickly as it will be a lot of fun for me].

In Eleonora’s next letter to Ercole, written on 25 June 1477, she revealed that she
was now fully in working mode, going straight to the issue of the duchess of Milan’s
unhappiness with the presence in Milan of Ferrante’s special envoy, Antonio Cicinello,
and her desire to have him recalled.43 She intimated that both Carafa and Ferrante were
happy with Ercole’s reading of the situation, and that the bishop of Policastro would be
sent in Cicinello’s place at his suggestion.44 Then, confirming that Ferrante had begun

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42 Ercole’s approach to the Milanese situation does appear to have been, at best, pragmatic. Within the
month of June 1477 he both successfully contracted the marriage between his infant heir, Alfonso, and
Anna Sforza, the small daughter of the duchess of Milan, and welcomed to Ferrara “honorevolmente” the
three Sforza brothers whom the same duchess had just banished from Milan because of their hostility to
her rule.

43 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1683, busta 131, autograph letter from Eleonora
d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 25 June 1477.

44 This was Frate Gabriele Attilio, who had been Ferrante’s ambassador to Ferrara in 1474 and who was
named as one of Isabella d’Este’s godfathers that same year; see Caleffini, 73 and 84. He left Ferrara in
June 1475, bound for Milan where he was to be Neapolitan ambassador; see Caleffini, 112. He was
therefore very familiar with the political milieu in Milan.
to use her as a conduit for his directives to Ercole, she advised him that: “vole Soa Maestà che tcossi lo fate intendere ala duchessa, et per non errare, el conte ve scrive quello voleno per via delo vostro inbascatore per parte del Signor Re dica ala duchessa’” [His Majesty wants you to let the duchess know this, and, in order not to make a mistake, the count is writing to you what they want you to say to the duchess through your ambassador on behalf of the king]. Next assuring Ercole with some confidence that she had the ear of both her father and Carafa: “sitché la Signoria Vostra stea attento quando sentite niente, mende atvisate ché non poterissevo credere quanto liberamente me parla el Signor Re e Ilo conte [and so that Your Lordship is aware when you hear nothing, tell me about it because you could not believe how freely the king talks to me, and the count].

It was then that Eleonora finally revealed the real agenda behind her “family” visit to Naples, the formation of a new League of Naples, Florence and Milan:

El conte me à dicto che averia voglia de fare quella liga propria che Ila Signoria Vostra me avea dicto altre volte et che averiamo desiderio che se facesse. El Signor Re dice che ll’ave restata con fiorentini et con Laurenzo et per fine mmo non l’à voluto asentire et che tquando isse ce venessero, tutte le altre seriano contenti perché credeno che Ila Signoria Vostra non diria de no, a nemanco la duchissa et quando fussero tucte de atcordio, venetiani ce veneriano volessero o non [The count told me that he wants to create that very same League that Your Lordship has spoken about to me on other occasions, and which we would like to happen. The King says that it has remained with the Florentines and Lorenzo and, up till now he has not wanted to agree to it, and that, if they came into it all the others would be happy because they believe that Your Lordship would not say no to anything without the Duchess and if everyone was in agreement, the Venetians would come into it whether they wanted to or not].

Of even greater significance was her reference to the matter which Moores believes was

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45 Fubini writes that Ferrante had initiated moves for the reforming of this League in April 1477; see Medici, Lettere, 2: 348–49.
the real purpose for her visit to Naples, Ercole’s desire to be appointed commander-in-chief of this new League:46

Io retspuse al conte allora ch e tquando questo fosse facto lo capitaneeo seria el duca del Rubino et lo isso me se incominizò atscusare per le altre cose passate et dissemo assai per modo che concrudesceso che at onnemmodo seria la Signoria Vostra et nianche io dubitaviavo che lla Signoria Vostra non cavalcaria cossi como fariè el duca de Rubino [I then replied to the count that, if this were to happen the formation of the new League, the commander-in-chief would be the duke of Urbino, and he began to make excuses for things done in the past and we spoke a lot so that we concluded that in any event it will be Your Lordship and not even I doubted that Your Lordship would ride just as the duke of Urbino will do].

Eleonora’s faith in Ercole’s capacities to lead this new League, with its huge responsibilities to restore some order to the situation in Milan, is both touching and pragmatic. Despite the fact that he was often incapacitated by an old war injury (although perhaps no more than the Duke of Urbino), Eleonora was clearly working very hard with Carafa and Ferrante to secure this very prestigious, and lucrative, post for him, hoping that her influence with them would make a difference. Given the sensitive nature of these negotiations, she revealed that she now regretted that they had not agreed to use a cipher for their correspondence before she left Ferrara. It was becoming apparent that she did not completely trust the count or her father, giving Ercole strict instructions about how he should reply to her letters:

io ve scrivo tutto quello che ssento et zoiche me dice el Signor Re et el Signor conte sitché ffate quando me scrivite retspondite da soa posta sequndo le cose che ve scrivo et questo fa per posserelo mostrare al conte quando so’ cose da mostrare perché non voglio satpiano zoiche ve scrivo [I’ll write to you everything I hear and what the king and the count tell me, and so do this when you write to me, reply by their post according to what I write to you, and do it in such a way that I can show the count the things which should be shown, because I don’t want them to know what I write to you].

Her mistrust of Carafa and Ferrante confirms the perception that her enforced separation from Ercole had heightened her feelings for him, finally convincing her that she owed her loyalty to him and not her father. Obviously feeling uncomfortable with this realization, her thoughts then turned to her little boy, whom she had not seen for more than a month. Asking Ercole to bless him for her, she lamented: “dio sa lo desiderio ò de vederlo ma multo più lo patre” [God knows how much I want to see him, but I want to see his father more].

Although Eleonora’s letter to Ercole on 4 July 1477 is badly damaged, enough of it can be read to reveal that she had not been working alone and that Cristoforo Rangone, Ercole’s confidential advisor, who had accompanied her to Naples, had also been conferring with Carafa and Ferrante. Clearly starting to feel the effects of her pregnancy, Eleonora suggested that: “io non piglìarò fatica de atvisarve de simele cose che nde lassarò lo inpaccìo at messer Cristofano et per lo tempo passato non ne avesse a ccossì bene sattissfatto atbiateme per scusata perché ò fatto quello ò saputo” [I’ll not take the trouble to advise you of similar things, the burden of which I’l leave to Misser Cristofano and, if have I not satisfied you so well in the past, you have to excuse me because I did what I could]. Then, referring to the imminent arrival of a certain Lodovico, she revealed that, “aspectolo con gran desiderio” [I await him with great eagerness], suggesting that this could well be the courtier she had requested that

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47 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1683, busta 131, autograph letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 4 July [1477], damaged.

48 This was Lodovico Condolmiero, referred to as a camerlengo [chamberlain] in 1473, the following year he received a gold chain worth seventy gold ducats from Ercole; see Caleffini, 29 and 90. Pardi writes that the family fell on hard times and that, in February 1480, Lodovico was accused of murder; see Zambotti, 73. His journey to Naples receives a passing mention in a letter from Niccolò Bendidio, Ferrarese ambassador in Florence, to Ercole: “Ho aviso da uno fiorentino che viene da Roma, che apresso Roma, il mangiò in l’hostaria cum Lodovico Condolmiero, qual pare che passasse da San Quirico cum circa 50 cavalli” [I am advised by a Florentine coming from Rome, that just outside Rome he ate in an inn with Lodovico Condolmiero, who it appears came by San Quirico with about fifty horses]; see ASMo, Cancelleria, Florence, busta 1, letter from Niccolò Bendidio to Ercole d’Este, Florence, 14 July 1477.
Ercole send her for her entertainment in her letter of 13 June.  

The question of the new League dominated the two letters that Cristoforo Rangone wrote to Ercole from Naples. In the first of these, dated 9 July 1477, he acknowledged Eleonora’s efforts on Ercole’s behalf:

essendo multo desiderosa la Illustriissima Madama vostra consorte de fare qualche digna opera a laude e exaltatione de Vostra Excellenza, e per piu firmecia del suo stato, ha pratichato cum il conte de Matalone [The Most Illustrious Madama, your wife, being most desirous of doing something worthy in praise and exaltation of Your Excellency, and in order to strengthen your state, has been in discussions with the count of Matalone].

He explained that Eleonora had worked towards one of two things in her discussions with her father and Carafa: in the event that a Liga particolare [specific alliance] of Naples, Milan and Florence were confirmed, that Ercole should be appointed the “capitanio generale” [commander-in-chief], or that Ferrante should send Ercole to the duchess of Milan to be the “locotenente e governatore” [Lieutenant-Governor] of her state, “cum fargli intendere quanto seria a proposito de sua Maestà che ce se obtinisse” [in order to keep her informed about the views of His Majesty]. Rangone revealed that he had now taken over the negotiations with Carafa and that the count had intimated that there were problems with both proposals. Firstly, Florence, and in particular Lorenzo de’ Medici, had no wish to join the new League, but that, if and when some agreement was finally reached, “la Maestà del Re certo haveria a memoria el facto de Vostra Signoria” [His Majesty the king will certainly remember Your Lordship’s case]. There were also major problems about Ercole’s desire to be locotenente generale of Milan. In the first place, “quella duchessa era scarsa e che non voria far la spesa e che ’l signor Constanzo se haveva voluto aconcìar cum Sua Signoria” [the duchess there

49 See above, 241.
50 ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1, Cristoforo Rangone to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 9 July 1477.
was tight with her money and did not want the expense, and that Signor Costanzo had wanted the position with Her Ladyship]. 51 Secondly, Carafa had explained that in order for Ercole to assume the position, the present incumbent, the Marquis of Mantua, would have to be dismissed, and that could not be entertained while his condotta was current. Rangone had replied to these excuses that while Costanzo Sforza, “era signor da bene e sufficiente dela qualitade sua, non era da fare comparatione a Vostra Signoria in cossa alcuna” [was a fine man and of sufficient quality, he could not be compared to Your Lordship in any way].

In her letter to Ercole on 13 July 1477, Eleonora was upset that letters between Naples and Ferrara had been intercepted and “so state aperte e viste” [opened and read], and that one from Paolo Antonio Trotti, Ercole’s secretary, had disappeared completely. 52 Cristoforo Rangone had now assumed most of the burden of keeping Ercole informed about his representations to the king on his behalf, but she was able to report to him that Ferrante’s ambassador to the papal court, Aniello Arcamone, had just arrived in Naples with the bull announcing Giovanni d’Aragona’s cardinalate, but urging him to secrecy: “non vole se plubica mo, ma credo ala festa se plubicarà ma la Signoria Vostra lo tenga secreto” [he doesn’t want it publicized now, but I believe it will be made public at the wedding celebrations, but Your Lordship should keep it a secret].

On 29 July 1477, Rangone wrote again to Ercole, assuring him that Eleonora was still working hard with her father to have him made Captain General or, if that did not eventuate, to obtain for him a position of command in Milan:

51 Costanzo Sforza, Lord of Pesaro, was the son of Alessandro Sforza and cousin of Galeazzo Sforza. He had been a condottiere first in the service of Milan and then Naples, when Ferrante had given him to bear the name “d’Aragona.” When his condotta [contract] with Naples expired in May 1477, and when Ferrante rejected his request for a larger stipend, he put his services on the open market. In February 1478, his condotta with Florence was stipulated by Lorenzo de’ Medici, and in the following April, his condotta with the league of Venice, Milan and Florence was confirmed; see Medici, Lettere, 2:382–5.

52 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1683, busta 131, autograph letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 13 July [1477].
Ferrante, however, had been able to promise nothing, because it transpired that the duchess had decided that, should the Marquis of Mantua not be available to be Luogotenente, the position would go to the Marquis of Monferrato, “che era stato altre fiade e che seria de mancho spesa” [who had held it at other times and will be less expensive].

Eleonora wrote a long letter to Ercole on the following day (20 July 1477), to inform her husband of the latest news from Milan. Eleonora was now more optimistic about Ferrante’s role in that state, writing that the duchess of Milan had agreed to send an ambassador to Naples, and assuring Ercole: “crediteme, Signor mio, che mai per lo Signor Re non restarà at fare cosa sua per conservazione de quillo stato” [Believe me, My Lord, that the king will never cease to do what he can for the preservation of that state].

Not everything concerned diplomatic matters. Alberto d’Este had been seeking Ercole’s financial assistance to equip him “at questa festa de seta et de broccate” [with

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53 ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Naples, busta 1, Cristoforo Rangoni to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 29 July 1477.
54 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1683, busta 131, autograph letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 20 July [1477], damaged.
silk and brocade for this celebration], and had sent his man to her to ask for a letter of recommendation to Ercole. Writing to Ercole that she had acceded to his request, she hoped that: “non me tenite per persontosa che ve atbia de scrivere de spendere ma per satisfare à tbesognato farlo” [you won’t think me presumptuous for having written to you about his spending but I had to do it to satisfy him].

The arrival of Lodovico Condolmiero, welcome as it was, had stirred in her even stronger feelings of longing for Ercole:

Devite penzare el piacere ne ò avuto et specialmen-te delo anello me avite mandato che non porrissevo credere quanto me ò stato caro che me a parso ve recordate de me ma at me Signore mio non me bisogna niscuna cosa perché io me recordo dela Signoria Vostra che tsegnore. Piuttosto me besognarìa lo contrario per questo stare mio cqua non ce essere remedio de accortarlo, ve promecto ché per non ve vedere ne sto tanto de mala voglia, non porrissevo credere et de questo me serà testimonio Ludovico et tucte queste che ssono cqua me serann testimonio [You’ll have to imagine the pleasure I’ve had from him, and especially from the ring you sent me. You could not believe how I treasure it, since it made me believe that you remember me, but for me, my Lord, there is no need for anything because I remember Your Lordship as my lord. Rather, I need the opposite, because, I promise you, since I cannot see you, you could not imagine how unwillingly I stay here, and Ludovico and all these people here will bear witness for me].

Eleonora’s handwriting in her letter to Ercole on 22 July 1477 is all but unreadable because it has deteriorated so badly.56 She was now seven months’ pregnant and her fatigue was apparent, especially as it was now the hottest part of summer.

Uncharacteristically, she responded tartly to his complaint that her letters had not arrived in Ferrara: “de che io non so dare altra colpa che ali correri como la Signoria Vostra vederà, avisando che mai non ò vostre littere che non siano state vii, viii di per

55 In the years ahead, Alberto will continue to use his charm and his friendship with Eleonora as a means of advocacy with his brother; see ASMo, Casa e Stato, busta 130, letters from Alberto Maria d’Este to Eleonora d’Aragona, 1474–79.
56 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1683, busta 131, autograph letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 22 July [1477].
viago” [for which I can only blame the couriers as Your Lordship will see, advising you that I never have letters from you which have not taken seven or eight days to get here]. Warning him that this letter would also be late arriving in Ferrara, as she had been waiting for Lodovico Condolmero to take it when he departed: “voglio la Signoria Vostra satpia la catg〈i〉one et non me tenga pigra” [I want Your Lordship to know that this is the reason <for its lateness> and you don’t think me lazy].

She now needed his advice about their new baby, since “oramai piacendo at dio so’vicina al parto” [I am now, God willing, close to my confinement]:

per non fare cosa senza licentia dela Signoria Vostra ve suplico me atvisate o matscolo o femmina che nommo ve piace et anco chi ve piacerà che lo battiza perché satpio quanno serò at quello quello averò da fare” [so as not to do anything without Your Lordship’s permission, I beg you to advise me, whether it’s a boy or a girl, of the name that you would like him to have, and also who will you want to hold him at baptism, so that when I’m at that stage, I’ll know what I have to do].

In her letter to Ercole of 30 July 1477, Eleonora revealed that she was now grateful that she had given Cristoforo Rangone the responsibility of representing his interests with Ferrante and Carafa, and of reporting on his discussions with them.57 He would be receiving a letter from Rangone, and another which she had had written after speaking with Ferrante, assuring Ercole of her father’s favour towards him: “non porrissevo credere con quanto amore me parla Soa Maestà de vostre facende et vederite per etsperienzia che per Soa Maestà non retstarà mai de fare cosa per la Signoria Vostra che ve sia onore et utele” [you couldn’t believe with how much love His Majesty speaks with me about what you’re doing, and you’ll see through experience that His Majesty will leave nothing undone for Your Lordship which honours you and is useful to you].

Clearly, Ferrante had been able to convince his daughter of the sincerity of his

57 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1683, busta 131, autograph letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 30 July [1477].
expressions of goodwill towards her husband, knowing full well that she would accept nothing less. Her willingness to believe these assurances, while almost pathetic, reflects her overwhelming desire that the two men resume their former harmonious relationship. She wrote that she would be giving this letter to Lodovico Condolmiero, who would deliver it to Ercole, when he returned to Ferrara, although she apologized for the length of time it would take to reach him, as Condolmiero would be returning by sea.

Eleonora’s next letter, dated 12 August 1477, is quite remarkable for the sense of overwhelming homesickness it conveys as she awaited the birth of her baby, far from the husband she had so obviously loved. Clearly, the return of Lodovico Condolmiero to Ferrara and the knowledge that he would now be with Ercole had increased her feelings of isolation and desperation, knowing that, because of the advanced stage of her pregnancy, she had no choice but to remain in Naples until after the birth. Eleonora’s repetition of the verb stare [to remain] eight times in this passage, surely provides some insight into her state of mind as she writes this letter to Ercole:

Io credo che allora che mo Lodovico deve essere con la Signoria Vostra et volesse Dio cossi ce fosse io et volesse Dio, Signor mio, che mme levasse questa memoria per fine che ò de stare cqua et staria più de bona voglia che non sto et starò fine sia cqua i’ò promesso che io dezo stare de bona voglia quanto più pozo ma niscuno piacere non posso pigliare. Prima l’animo non me lo recerca, et anco per stare grossa, come deve penzare la Signoria Vostra, dego stare. Io me sforzarò per de fare quello me recordate de faticarme per respecto de lo parto, et se mai ebe volontà de stare bene de parto, si è questo per possereme tanto più presto partire per venire at trovarve che llo deseo più che tcosa del mondo [I think now that Lodovico must be with Your Lordship, and I wish to God that I were there too, and may it be God’s will, My Lord, that He might make me forget this for as long as I have to stay here, and I would stay here more happily than I currently do and I will stay here as long as I have promised and I will stay willingly as long as I can but I take no pleasure from it. First my spirit will not let me, and then, because I am big with child, as Your Lordship can certainly imagine, I have to stay. I shall force myself to do that. You remind me to get everything organised with regard to the birth, and if ever I wanted to have a healthy birth, it is now, so that I can leave all the sooner to come to join
you, as I desire more than anything in the world].

The good news was that Ferrante’s new queen was expected to arrive from day to day, but she could not come soon enough for Eleonora: “che dio lo fatcòa sia presto” [may God make it soon]! She had already suggested to Ercole that: “se io fosse figliata, suplirà messer Nicolò” [if I’ve given birth, Messer Niccolò will substitute], referring the possibility that Niccolò da Correggio, could represent her at the marriage celebrations.

Eleonora’s letter of 6 September 1477 is damaged but it follows a now familiar pattern. First expressing her happiness that both he and their small son were well, and then her impatience to return to Ferrara, because “pareme mille anne” [it seems like thousand years] since they parted. With amazing candour, she wrote that, if he were to see her, he would only pity her, “tanto so’ grassa et rengrascevele” [as I am so big and clumsy]. Her feelings of homesickness had increased as her pregnancy drew towards its end and all she now hoped for is that God would grant her grace “farme essire a tsalvamento che onnen cosa me passarò” [to get me out of this safely so that I will overcome everything]. Then, it was back to business for a moment. Revealing that Ercole had sent money for a quantity of salnitro [saltpeter] from Puglia, she wrote that they now had to decide the safest route for it to be taken to Ferrara. She and the

58 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1683, busta 131, autograph letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 12 August [1477].
60 ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1683, busta 131, autograph letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 6 September [1477], damaged.
61 Salinitro or potassium nitrate was used in the manufacture of gunpowder when mixed with sulphur and charcoal. Naples, in particular Puglia, had abundant resources of salnitro, putting Ferrante in a very powerful position. However, its transportation was dangerous as bad weather could cause the loss of all or part of the cargo and, when carried by sea, captains had to make sure that the sea was calm and routes were secure. In the 1470s most was shipped to Genoa, while in the 1480s Pisa and Ancona became the principal destinations; see Silvia Bianchessi, “Cavalli, armi e salnitro fra Milano e Napoli nel secondo Quattrocento (1466–92),” Nuova rivista storica 82 (1998): 541–82 (572).
duchess of Calabria had paid a visit to the papal legate, Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, who
had arrived in Naples to officiate at Ferrante’s marriage and the coronation of his new
queen. The young cardinal, “ce a facto assai carize et onore” [had been most
affectionate towards us and paid us honour], and she suggested that maybe he should be
asked to baptize their new baby. She closed the letter expressing how delighted she
and the little girls had been with the portrait of little Alfonso that Ercole had
thoughtfully sent to comfort her as she approached this latest confinement.

The Royal Wedding

Although Eleonora was to write no further letters to Ercole for a month, the Neapolitan
diarist, Giuliano Passero, takes up the description of the festivities which accompanied
Ferrante’s marriage and the coronation of his new queen. He reports the arrival at
the Castel dell’Ovo of the duke of Calabria’s fleet bearing Giovanna d’Aragona on
9 September 1477, and, after two days’ rest, her welcome at the nearby Molo Grande
by Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, the duchess of Calabria and “altre assaissime donne”
[a very large number of other ladies], after which the whole party had proceeded to
the cathedral where the future Queen of Naples was blessed.

At the cathedral, on Sunday 14 September, the marriage took place, Cardinal
Rodrigo putting the ring on Giovanna’s finger and saying the Mass of the Holy Spirit in

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62 Rodrigo Borgia, the future Alexander VI. Passero, records his arrival in Naples: “A di primo de
settembre 1477, de lunedì alle 21 hora ei intrato in Napoli lo Cardinal Borges Vice cancellerio et legato
del papa, et fo ricevuto con lo palio, et lo Signore Re Ferrante l’ei andato a scontrare con assai signori,
sono entrati con lo palio tutti dui lo Signore Re Ferrante et lo Cardinale, et desmontato a Piscopio, lo
detto Cardinale è Catalano, et se chiama lo Cardinale Roderigo Borges quale fo nipote de Papa Calisto”
[On 1 September 1477, a Monday at about 3 o’clock, Cardinal Borgia, the Vice-Chancellor and papal
legate, entered Naples, and he was welcomed under a baldachino, and King Ferrante went to meet him
with many nobles. Both men, King Ferrante and the Cardinal, went in under the baldacchino and
dismounted at the cathedral. This Cardinal, a Catalan, is called Rodrigo Borgia, and he was the nephew of
Pope Calixtus]; see Giuliano Passero Cittadino Napoletano, o sia prima pubblicazione in istampa che
delle storie in forma di giornali (Naples: Vincenzo Orsino, 1785), 32–33, hereafter referred to as Passero.
63 Passero, 33.
the presence of the royal couple, forty bishops and “tutti li signuri dello reame” [all the lords the realm]. Passero’s description of the coronation of the young queen evokes the great solemnity and magnificence of the occasion, as Giovanna, “sopra un cavallo bianco guarnito tutto di gioie, et di perne che se disse hoggi che questo cavallo così guarnito et la corona che have portata in testa re Ferrante valeno più de 20 milia ducati” [mounted on a white horse, studded with jewels and with pearls, so that they say today that this horse thus decorated, and the crown which King Ferrante wore on his head, were worth more than 20,000 ducats].

Passero describes in great detail the complex rituals of the coronation which followed Giovanna’s arrival at a stage specially erected for the occasion. First she was annointed with oil by Cardinal Rodrigo, then “messer Aniello Arcamone pigliai la corona da lo altare et portaila avante re Ferrante, et, tenendola inanti allo re fece un certo sermon, et dopoi la tornai alla altare, fatto questo lo duca de Calabria portai la regina inanti lo cardinale et lo cardinale le pose la corona in testa” [Misser Aniello Arcamone took the crown from the altar and took it to King Ferrante, and, holding it before him, said a few words, and then returned it to the altar, whereupon the duke of Calabria carried the crown to the cardinal who placed it on her head].

Passero writes that Eleonora’s role at the coronation had been limited to that of a spectator: “Alla incoronatione della detta regina ci venne madama Dionora d’Aragona duchessa di Ferrara con quattro carrette tutte piene di donne: essa era prena, et steva allo mese per figliare d’hora in hora” [Madama Dionora d’Aragona, duchess of Ferrara, came to the queen’s coronation with four wagons full of ladies; she was in the last

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64 Passero, 34.
65 Passero, 34. Arcamone was Ferrante’s long-term ambassador to the papal court in Rome. A distinguished Neapolitan jurist, he first arrived in Rome in June 1473 as an advocate for Ferrante’s candidates for the cardinalate, Giovanni Gianderoni and Guglielmo Rocha. He remained at the papal court with a few brief absences until 1486, when he fell from grace, suspected of disloyalty to Ferrante. Arcamone’s choice for a pivotal role in the coronation ceremony, a role otherwise reserved for peers of the realm, is a sign of his influence with Ferrante and a reflection of the close diplomatic relationship between the king and Sixtus IV; see Dover, “Royal Diplomacy,” 70–71.
month of her pregnancy and expected to give birth from hour to hour]. Passero describes the celebratory joust, held on 18 September 1477 in the presence of Ferrante and his new queen, a splendid event at which both horses and riders shone with the gold with which they were attired, testimony indeed of Ferrante’s love of magnificentia and the vast wealth of his kingdom.

The Way Home

Eleonora’s baby boy was born the following day at the Castel Capuano. The news took over a week to reach Ferrara, and the courier, finding that both Ercole and Sigismondo had gone to Modena, “a piacere” [for pleasure], was forced to go on to that city to inform Ercole of his wife’s safe delivery. The child was baptized on 7 October 1477, and “fu tenuto a baptesimo dal cardinale San Pietro in Vincula da Savona, e da l’ambasatore de Lorenzo de Cosmo primario fiorentino, e perché nacque la festa de San Zenaro, che se guarda a Napoli, ge fu messo nome Ferrante, Alovise, Zoanne Maria e Zenaro, con triumphi, regali” [he was held at his baptism by the Cardinal of San Sisto in Vincula, from Savona, and by the ambassador of Lorenzo de’ Medici, the leading citizen of Florence, and since he was born on the Feast of San Genaro, which is observed in Naples, he was given the names, Ferrante, Alovise, Giovanni Maria and Gennaro, and this was accompanied by triumphs and gifts]. It is unclear from this description if Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia baptized the child, although Ferrante’s pairing of

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66 Passero, 35.
67 “Tutti li guarnimenti tanto de li cavalli, quanto de cavalieri sono stati d’imbroccato, et li guarnimenti de li cavalli erano longhi fino in terra; tutte le lanze erano indorate, overo coperte di raso giallo” [All the accoutrements of the horses and the knights were brochade, and those of the horses reached to the ground; all the lances were gilded, or covered with gold satin]; see Passero, 35.
68 Giuliano della Rovere, the future Julius II, was born in Albisola Superiore in the province of Savona, Liguria.
69 The Feast of San Gennaro is celebrated 19th September, to commemorate the martyrdom of the bishop of Benevento in 305AD by the Emperor Diocletian. Popular belief has it that the blood of the saint liquifies on this day in its ampoule in Naples Cathedral.
70 Zambotti, 41 and n. 8.
Sixtus’s nephew, Giuliano della Rovere, with Lorenzo de’ Medici as his godparents possibly reflected his strongly-held desire to reconcile forces which were threatening to destroy the peace of Italy.\textsuperscript{71}

Eleonora left Naples on 17 October 1477, ten days after her baby’s baptism. While Moores comments on the speed of her departure after the birth, her letters to Ercole had clearly shown how anxious she was to return to her life with him and to see her other small son in Ferrara.\textsuperscript{72} She would also be travelling by sea from Naples to Livorno, which was shorter and less onerous than the overland route, but one which needed to be undertaken before the winter set in. She wrote one last letter to Ercole on the day before her departure.\textsuperscript{73} Her father had been away hunting, and, in his absence, she had been busy in discussions with Carafa about the ongoing payment of her dowry:

\begin{quote}
Atvisarò la Signoria Vostra de quello ò ffecto dela mia dota; io fice parlare al Signor Re dalo conte che tpiacesse at Soa Maestà de assignarme qualche luoco che io potesse retscotere la mia dota seundo Soa Maestà me à ipromese. Soa Maestà me fece retspondere essere contento et perchè le tratte delo grano non era cossì cosa ferma Soa Maestà me volea donare mille carro de sale che se nde ave onne anno doi milia et cinco ciento docate.\textsuperscript{74} Io le ò atzettate et rengraciato Soa Maestà e a m ø è parso meglio questo che nniente e cossì me nde farò ffare el previlegio et poi la Signoria Vostra poterà mandare at piglarele et intendere quello ce serà da fare [I will tell Your Lordship what I have done about my dowry. I got the count speak to the king, and to ask His Majesty if he would to give me some place where I could draw on my dowry, as promised to me by His Majesty. His Majesty sent word in reply that he was happy to do so, and that since the revenues from grain were not so reliable, His Majesty wished to give me a thousand cartloads of salt, giving an income of 2,500 ducats every year. I accepted his offer and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{71} Abulafia, The French Descent, 13.
\textsuperscript{72} Moores, Diomede Carafa, 303.
\textsuperscript{73} ASMo, Carteggio dei Principi, Casa e Stato, 1683, busta 131, autograph letter from Eleonora d’Aragona to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 16 October [1477].
\textsuperscript{74} This is confirmed by Persico: “È nel Repert. Magni Sigilli, fol. 183a, Arch. Stato Nap., che per l’itera soddisfazione della dote di Eleonora fu poi data licenza al duca Ercole di raccogliere 11,200 carri di sale nelle saline di Manfredonia, di Bari e di Trani, con Privilegio del 18 novembre 1477”; see Persico, 99, n. 2. Salt was an important commodity, used in preserving meats of all types, including fish, in the preparation of dairy products. It was also essential in the tanning of hides and the treatment of textile fibres, and the preparation of both human and animal medications. The control of its production acquired a strategic political importance.
thanked His Majesty and this seemed to me better than nothing. Therefore I will have the charter made and then Your Lordship will be able to send for them and find out what is to be done].

It is significant that Eleonora had decided to use the last days of her visit to Naples, and her influence with Carafa, to raise the issue of her dowry payments. Not only was she determined to pursue what she was owed her by her father, but her response, that she has accepted her father’s offer of salt because it was “better than nothing,” suggests that she now realised that Ferrante had not been averse to short-changing her in the payment of her dowry.

In this letter, the constitutional crisis in Milan which had previously preoccupied her was replaced by the succession contest in Faenza. This situation was a cause of great concern for Ercole, who had a common border with Faenza, so that, when he and his court had left for Belriguardo on 25 August 1477, “hanno portati con sieco tuti le soe arme, nè se scia perché, ma solo se dice perché el Signore de Faenza hè in articulo de morte…e perhò il duca sta preparato al bixogno” [they took with them all their weapons, nobody knows why, but they only say that it is because the Lord of Faenza is about to die…and perhaps the duke is ready in case he needs to be]. Eleonora wrote that Ferrante had involved himself in resolving the situation only out of concern for Ercole and his borders, and therefore, “lo Signore da Faenza po rengraziare la Signoria Vostra de quello che llo Signor Re ave facto” [the Lord of Faenza can thank Your Lordship for what the King has done].

75 This struggle was between the ailing Carlo II Manfredi, and his child heir, Ottaviano, on one side, and Galeotto, the Carlo’s younger brother on the other.
76 Zambotti, 37 and n. 2.
77 On 21 October 1477, Ferrante announced the marriage of one of his natural daughters to Carlo Manfredi’s heir, Ottaviano, thus putting his considerable weight behind that youth’s succession. Fubini writes that, by this action, Ferrante was putting himself into direct conflict with Sixtus IV, who in 1473 had granted his nephew, Girolamo Riario, the lordship of Imola as a dowry for his marriage with Caterina Sforza, and who had ambitions to unite the jurisdictions of Imola and Faenza. The trade-off was that Ferrante offered Riario the territory of Sessa and the title of Gran Connestabile of Naples; see Medici, Lettere, II, 438.
Eleonora finished her final letter to Ercole on an intimate note, revealing that, since the arrival of Ferrante’s new queen, Giovanna, in Naples, she had become very close to her, even expressing her regret at having to part from her so soon:

Io so’ stata alo castello novo con la Rejna che mme à factto tante carize quante se poza dire alo mundo, per modo che non poterissevo credere quanto me pesa de lassarla et non poterissevo credere dela sua bontate [I have been with the queen at the Castel Nuovo and she has shown me such affection as anyone in the world could imagine, so that you couldn’t believe how it pains me to leave her and you couldn’t believe her goodness].

She revealed that she was having difficulty arranging her departure: “Signor mio, io son tornata castegliana inportuna de sollicitare la mia partuta et, se io non la sollicita, non ène niscuno dacquà che se nde qura perché non voleriano me partesse ma non credete io lassarò de sollicitare” [My Lord, I have become an annoying Castillian seeking permission to depart and, if I don’t seek it, there is no one here who will care about it since they don’t want me to leave, but don’t think that I’ll stop seeking it].

Permission for Eleonora’s departure came at a price. When she finally left Naples, she would leave behind her two-year-old daughter, Beatrice, and the new baby, Ferrante, both of whom would remain in Naples for many years, “per consolatione de la Maestà” [as a source of consolation for His Majesty]. As there had never been any suggestion in Eleonora’s letters that she was being asked to return without one or other of her children, this may have been a last-minute decision on Ferrante’s part, aimed at ensuring that Ferrante retained some hold over Ercole. Eleonora’s sadness was palpable when she described her feelings about being separated from her tiny baby: “Signor mio, non poterissevo credere Ferrante quanto se fa bello et non me poterià scrivere quanto me rencrese de lassarlo” [My Lord, you could not believe how beautiful Ferrante is, and I could not put into words how sorry I am to leave him]. Zambotti records

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78 This may be a pejorative reference to the Castillian character.
79 Zambotti, 41.
Eleonora’s return to Ferrara on 14th November 1477. Ercole had gone in the *bucintoro* with his court to meet her and Isabella in Modena and they had travelled together to the port of San Paolo where, “ge andò incontra tuta la citade con alegreza, e sonava le campane e se faxeva feste con schiopitti” [the whole city went out to meet them with joy, and they rang the bells and they celebrated with gunfire].

In her letters to Ercole from Naples Eleonora had shown herself in two totally different guises; on the one hand, the hard-working ducal consort acting in a quasi-official capacity for her husband, canvassing his interests with Ferrante, keeping him informed about the king’s initiatives in Milan and attempting to justify his political stance with Carafa, and, on the other, the intensely homesick young woman, in love with her husband and missing him and her life with him in Ferrara, and realizing that she could do nothing to heal the growing rift between him and her father.

Eleonora’s ability to inspire love and loyalty in those around her is exemplified by a letter that Diomede Carafa wrote to her on 22 November 1477, soon after her return to Ferrara. This is in fact the first surviving letter from Carafa to Eleonora herself, although their correspondence had apparently begun soon after her arrival in Ferrara.

Carafa’s unashamedly emotional expressions of affection for the young duchess in this letter, feelings that had been re-ignited by her visit to Naples, would appear to come straight from the heart:

Creda la Vostra Illustissima Signoria che ante morerò che mai me desmentiche de Quella, la quale aìò amata ultra la reverencia de patrone, ma piú che mai patre amasse figlya, ché le vertú vostre et la demostracione <che> me’nde avite facete cossi requedeno [May Your Most Illustrious Ladyship believe that, until I die, I will never forget you,

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80 Zambotti, 41.
81 ASMo, Estero, Principi e Signorie, Naples–Sicily, busta 4, autograph letter from Diomede Carafa to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 22 November [1477].
82 See Moores, “Diomede Carafa,” 400, referring to Carafa’s letter of 20 November 1474 in which he complains about Eleonora’s dilatoriness in answering his letters to her.
whom I have loved beyond the respect for a patron, but more than a father ever loved a
daughter, because your virtues and the affection which you have shown me require it].

Whatever his feelings for her husband, and these were now less than positive, Carafa
clearly loved this young woman, and would continue to do through all the challenges
that lay ahead. From his close reading of all Carafa’s letters to Eleonora, Moores adds
his voice in support of the sincerity of the count of Matalone’s expressions of affection
for the young duchess:

Whilst it is wise to be cautious in assuming too readily that Carafa nourished an affection
of exceptional warmth towards Eleonora, there are, nevertheless, substantial grounds for
not dismissing the assumption too sceptically, and despite the difficulties that surround
the interpretation of their correspondence, it is this correspondence that provides the most
conclusive evidence. 83

There is a distinct sense of valediction in this letter, that Carafa was bidding farewell to
the young woman he had loved and served for so long because he already sensed that
their relationship would be a casualty of the growing rift between Ferrante and Ercole I.

Within months of Eleonora’s return to Ferrara that rift would escalate into war
amid the recriminations which followed the attempted assassination of Lorenzo de’
Medici and his brother, Giuliano, on Easter Day, 26 April 1478. That war, its effects of
the marriage of Ercole and Eleonora and their involvement in the peace process which
brought it to an end, will be examined in the final chapter of this dissertation. The war
was to be a particularly difficult period for Eleonora and she would need all her ability
to inspire affection and loyalty in those around and her own strength of purpose to help
her through the difficult months which lay ahead, as she watched the destruction of the
diplomatic bridges which she had helped to build between her husband and her father.