

Chapter 1

Education: Eleonora in her Father's Court

Little has been published about Eleonora before her marriage, her life at the Aragonese court in Naples and the events which shaped the woman she was to become in later life. This chapter will therefore be a review of the circumstances in which Eleonora lived until her departure from Naples at the age of twenty-three. It will discuss the culture to which she was exposed at the Aragonese court in her youth, and the details her first marriage and subsequent divorce, providing a context for the development of those particular qualities which she brought to her marriage with Ercole d'Este, and developing the skills and resilience that would keep her safe and loved even when her father and her husband were at war.

At the Court of Alfonso the Magnanimous

Eleonora d'Aragona was born in 1450, the second of five children from the marriage of Ferrante d'Aragona and Isabella da Chiaromonte. Ferrante was the second Aragonese king of Naples, from 1458 to 1494 ruling the kingdom of Naples, formally known as the *Regnum Sicilie citra Farum* [the Kingdom of Sicily this side of the straits of Messina], but generally referred to simply as the *Regno* or *Reame*.¹ The other five children from the marriage were Eleonora's younger sister, Beatrice (1457–1508), who became queen of Hungary in 1476, her elder brother, the heir, Alfonso, duke of Calabria (1448–94), and three younger brothers, Federico (1452–1501), Giovanni (1456–85) and Francesco

¹ Ferrante is always referred to as "Rex Sicilie etc." in his letter headings.

(1461–86). Her mother was a Neapolitan noblewoman and the orphaned daughter of Tristano da Chiaromonte, conte of Copertino, and a member of the powerful Balzo Orsini family, described by Pontieri as “una famiglia di schietta tradizione angevina e francese” [a family of pure Angevin and French heritage].² Ferrante, who is also often referred to by the Italian version of his name, Ferdinando, was the illegitimate son of the Spanish king, Alfonso V of Aragon, who, after an earlier aborted attempt in 1421–43, had finally wrested Naples from two centuries of Angevin rule in 1442 and ruled there until his death in 1458.³ Alfonso never returned to Spain, leaving the rule of his kingdom of Aragon to his brother, Juan, and his wife, Maria.⁴ Alfonso’s generosity, especially to men of letters, gained him the sobriquet “il Magnanimo” [the Magnanimous].⁵

The marriage of Eleonora’s parents was apparently happy, despite their markedly different natures. Isabella was a pious and sober woman who eschewed her husband’s worldliness and taste for luxury and ostentation.⁶ Her piety and her courage in adversity were praised by the Bolognese humanist, Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, who

² Ernesto Pontieri, *Per la storia del regno di Ferrante I d’Aragona Re di Napoli* (Naples: Morano, 1945; 2nd rev. ed., Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1969), 62; all citations are from the 1969 edition.

³ Alfonso’s triumphal entry into Naples on 26 February 1443 is depicted on the magnificent Aragonese Arch at the entrance of the former Angevin fortress, the Castel Nuovo, which he later had adapted for use as his personal residence in Naples; see George Hersey, *The Aragonese Arch at Naples* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973). For a description of Alfonso’s campaign to secure Naples, see Alan Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous, King of Aragon, Naples and Sicily, 1396–1458* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 210–51. The triumph is also celebrated in two Florentine *cassoni*, now in private hands; see Philine Helas, *Lebende Bilder in der italienischen Festkultur des 15. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999), 59–88, 209–12; and her “*Alphonsis Regis Triumphus und die florentinische Selbst-Inszenierung anlässlich des Einzuges von Alfonso d’Aragona in Neapel 1443*,” *Fifteenth Century Studies* 26 (2001): 86–101.

⁴ I have been unable to access his article titled “La giovinezza di Ferrante I d’Aragona,” in *Studi in onore di Riccardo Filangieri*, 3 vols. (Naples: L’Arte Tipografica, 1959), 1:531–601, but I have consulted a review of it by Yves Renouard in *Bulletin Hispanique* 63 (1961) : 129–30.

⁵ Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le vite*, 1: 83–117. Vespasiano gained an intimate knowledge of the king’s character from his friend, the Florentine humanist, Giannozzo Manetti, who was first a diplomat and later a royal councillor at the court of Naples; see Bentley, 10–11, 122–27. Ernesto Pontieri only covers the Italian career of Alfonso I in his *Alfonso il Magnanimo, re di Napoli 1435–1459* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1975); for a more complete biography, including a comprehensive study of Alfonso I’s Spanish background, see Alan Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous*.

⁶ Pontieri, *Per la storia*, 67, 73.

included her among the exceptional women whose lives he celebrated in his encomiastic work, *Gynevera de le clare donne*, which he dedicated to Ginevra Sforza in 1483.⁷ Describing Isabella as a beautiful and graceful woman, he writes that “li suoi habiti et vestiti furono neapolitani et modestissimi, senza ostensione de le pompe, come hogidi usano molte donne per lasivia, ma quasi tutto il pecto cum vera honestà portava coperto” [her garments were Neapolitan and very modest, without revealing her breasts, as nowadays many women do for lasciviousness, but she covered almost all her chest with genuine virtue].⁸ He also praised the courage she had displayed when she was informed in July 1460 that Ferrante, fighting for his right to succeed his father to the throne of Naples, had been defeated at the battle of Sarno. She had straightaway gone out to address the people of Naples and successfully sought their financial support to continue her husband’s campaign.⁹ While Arienti’s claim, that “Isabella per sei anni sola governò la città de Neapoli, capo del regno, cum iustitia et tranquillità et amore de cittadini” [for six years Isabella governed the city alone, as head of the kingdom, with justice and peace and the love of the people], cannot be sustained, the anecdote resonates well with Eleonora’s own later actions as duchess of Ferrara.¹⁰

Eleonora’s attachment to the Clarissan sisters of Corpus Domini in Ferrara, which culminated in her decision to be buried among them, also appears to have been nurtured at her mother’s knee. Isabella is known to have possessed a manuscript copy of the

⁷ Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, *Gynevera delle clare donne*, Scelta di curiosità letterarie inedite o rare dal secolo XIII al XIX, disp. 223 (Bologna: Commissione per i Testi di Lingua, 1969), 245–63, hereafter referred to as Sabadino, *Gynevera*. In her study of the letters of Sabadino degli Arienti, Carolyn James reveals that, in June 1492, he sent an autograph copy of the manuscript of *Gynevera* to Isabella d’Este, shortly after she became the wife of Francesco Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua. This astute move, no doubt driven by the prospect of Isabella’s patronage, could be excused by the inclusion of her maternal grandmother among the writer’s illustrious ladies; see Carolyn James, *The Letters of Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti (1481–1510)* (Florence: Olschki, 2002), 125–27.

⁸ Sabadino, *Gynevera*, 248–50.

⁹ Sabadino, *Gynevera*, 254–55. The diarist, Passero, also describes this incident; see *Giuliano Passero. Cittadino napoletano, o sia prima pubblicazione in istampa che delle manoscritte in forma di giornali ...* (Naples: Vincenzo Orsino, 1785), 2: 26–27.

¹⁰ Sabadino, *Gynevera*, 252.

spiritual guide, *Sette armi spirituali*, of the Clarissan nun, Caterina Vigri, who had been educated at the Estense court in Ferrara in the 1420s, before entering the convent of Corpus Domini and later establishing a branch of the Order in Bologna.¹¹ Although the work does not appear in Bertoni's index of Eleonora's library, she clearly would have had access to it in her frequent visits to Corpus Domini.¹² The only known portrait of Queen Isabella concurs with her reputation for extreme piety. Its original location was in the *predella* of an altarpiece, formerly in the San Vincenzo Ferrer chapel in the Neapolitan church of San Pietro Martire, where she prayed daily and asked to be buried.¹³ It is also the source for the first known portrait of Eleonora, who, with her brother, Alfonso, kneels beside her mother in prayer (see below, Fig.1). Eleonora is shown neither closing her eyes in prayer nor reading a devotional book, but looking directly out from the canvas at the viewer, her arms crossed demurely across her waist. She is not depicted as a beauty, but as a serious, slender girl, aged about fifteen, if it is accepted that the work was executed after Isabella's death in March 1465 to be hung

¹¹ Caterina Vigri, *Le sette armi spirituali*, ed. Antonella Degl'Innocenti (Florence: SISMELE, 2000). After her death and burial in March 1463, Vigri's body had been exhumed in the presence of the Cardinal Legate to Bologna, Angelo Capranica, who found it to be uncorrupted. Soon after this he had sent a copy of the *Sette armi spirituali*, to Isabella, who had developed a great devotion to her; see *The Rule of the Holy Virgin Saint Clare together with the Admirable Life of Saint Catherine of Bologna of the Same Order* (Permectum Superiorum 1626; reprint London/ Ilkley: Scholar Press, 1965). There is, however, no proof that the queen paid a visit to the saint's body in 1465 to place her crown on Caterina's head; see Sabadino, *Gynevera*, 242–43, 258. This story is the basis for Wormald's identification of Caterina Vigri as the subject of a painting now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London; see Francis Wormald, "A Saint Identified in a Lee Picture," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 25 (1962): 129–30.

¹² Giulio Bertoni, *La biblioteca Estense e la coltura ferrarese ai tempi del duca Ercole I (1471–1505)* (Turin: Loescher, 1903), 229–33.

¹³ Her funeral is described in an anonymous Neapolitan diary: "A 31 marzo fu fatto solenne essequio della detta Illustrissima Regina Isabella: foro vestito de nigro quattro huomini per Seggio, li quali portaro lo pallio con altri Signori de lo Reame; e lo Letto grande lo portaro Signori de lo Reame, e fo portata a San Pietro Martire, et andò vestita con l'abito di San Domenico con una corona in testa, ed una palla d'oro a la mano sinistra, et una bacchetta a la mano destra" [On 31 March the funeral ceremony of the Illustrious Queen Isabella was held: four men from each district were dressed in black, and they carried the *pallium* with other lords of the kingdom; and lords of the realm carried the great bed, and she was borne to San Pietro Martire, and she was dressed in the habit of a Dominican with a crown on her head, and a golden orb in her left hand and a sceptre in her right]; see Schiappoli, 124, citing "Diario anonimo dall'anno MCXCIII sino al MCCCCLXXXVII ritrovato nel libro di Lodovico Raymo Seniore, intitolato Successi Varj," in *Raccolta di varie croniche, diari ed altri opuscoli così italiani come latini appartenenti alla storia del Regno di Napoli di Pietro Giannone*, ed. Alessio Aurelio Pelliccia, 5 vols. (Naples: Bernardo Perger, 1780–82), 1:108–56 (128–29).

above her tomb in a side chapel of San Pietro Martire. The date of 1465 would suggest that this is a reasonably accurate portrait of Eleonora shortly before her first marriage to Sforza Maria Sforza in September 1465. The elderly man on Eleonora's right is thought to be Carlo Pagano, Isabella's long-serving chamberlain who, knowing her devotion for the Spanish saint, San Vincenzo Ferrer, reputedly had the chapel constructed for her.¹⁴

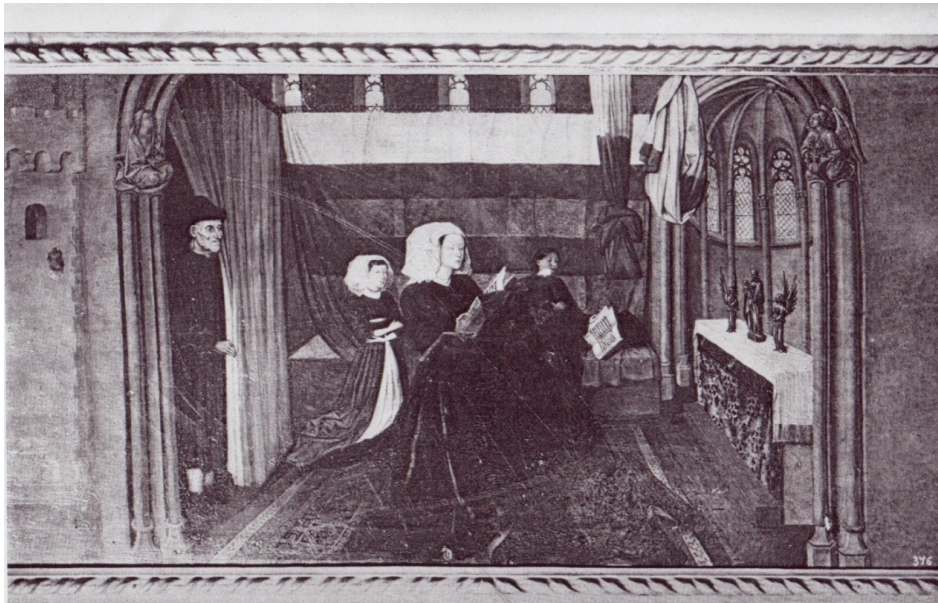


Figure 1: Eleonora d'Aragona and her brother, Alfonso, duke of Calabria, at prayer with their mother, Queen Isabella of Naples, in the Palatine Chapel, Castel Nuovo, Naples. Predella of the S. Vincenzo Ferrer altarpiece, Naples, Capodimonte Museum (formerly in S. Pietro Martire, Naples). Attributed to Niccolò Antonio Colantonio, c.1465.

Isabella died in March 1465, three months before Ferrante's final victory in the war of succession gave him legitimacy as king of Naples, and less than two weeks after her second son, Federigo, left Naples for Milan to act as his brother, Alfonso's, proxy in his marriage to Ippolita Maria Sforza, daughter of the duke of Milan.¹⁵

¹⁴ Benedetto Croce, "Due letterine familiari di principesse italiane del Quattrocento," *Humanisme et Renaissance* 6 (1939): 295. The altarpiece has been attributed to various artists, the name of Colantonio appearing most often; see Fausto Nicolini, *L'arte napoletana del Rinascimento* (Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1925), 218–20. San Pietro Martire, a Spanish Dominican, had been canonized in 1455 by the Borgia pope, Calixtus III, at the request of Alfonso I.

¹⁵ The Florentine herald, Francesco Filarete, writes of Federigo's visit to Florence en route to Milan: "Non ho ffatto menzione inprima della venuta di don Federigo perchè quando parti da Napoli per andare per la nuova sposa del fratello, ivi a pochi di di sua mossa morì la reina sua madre. E perchè a ccaminò e alla venuta sua sendo in abito di corrotto, non si fece alcuna pompa a sua venuta" [I have not said anything before about the arrival of Don Federigo because, when he left Naples to go for his brother's new bride, a few days after he left, his mother the queen died. Because on the way and when he arrived he was dressed in mourning, there was no pomp and ceremony on his arrival]; see Francesco Filarete

There is no modern biographical study of Eleonora's father, Ferrante I of Naples, apart from a collection of studies by Pontieri, which appeared in two editions in 1945 and 1963. Burckhardt's references to Ferrante as, "equalled in ferocity by none among the princes of his time," adding that, "he concentrated all his powers, among which must be reckoned profound dissimulation and an irreconcilable spirit of vengeance, on the destruction of his opponents," have influenced modern perceptions of the king, while another of Burckhardt's references, that the king was "recognized as one of the most powerful political minds of the day," is often ignored.¹⁶ Abulafia has been at pains to correct this negative image of Ferrante, suggesting that it originated "in the violent controversies that raged over the legitimacy of Ferrante's claim to the throne, and in the constant attempts of French princes to assert their own right to the kingdom of Naples."¹⁷ He was known to be taciturn, while even his loyal secretary, Giovanni Pontano, acknowledged his "capacity for cold political calculation."¹⁸ However, given both the constant uncertainty about the legitimacy of his position within his own kingdom and the general suspicion with which he was regarded by his fellow Italian rulers, Ferrante's time as king of Naples was never easy. Dover decries the fact that "historians and contemporaries alike have rarely hesitated to heap opprobrium on Ferrante's character, painting an almost cartoonish figure of deceit, guile and cruelty."¹⁹

Ferrante was born in Barcelona in June 1423, the illegitimate child of a liaison between Alfonso and Gueraldona Carlina Revertit, the wife of a Barcelona

and Angelo Manfidi, *The Libro ceremoniale of the Florentine Republic*, ed. Richard C. Trexler (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1978), 83.

¹⁶ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 4th ed., trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: Phaidon, 1951), 23.

¹⁷ David Abulafia, "Introduction: From Ferrante I to Charles VIII," in *The French Descent Into Renaissance Italy 1494–95: Antecedents and Effects*, ed. David Abulafia (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), 3.

¹⁸ Bentley, 21–22.

¹⁹ Paul M. Dover, "Royal Diplomacy in Renaissance Italy: Ferrante d'Aragona (1458–94) and his Ambassadors," *Mediterranean Studies* 14 (2005): 57–94 (58).

merchant.²⁰ He was called to Italy by his father in 1438, accompanied by his tutor, Ximenes Pérez de Corella, governor of Valencia. Alfonso's two natural daughters from another relationship, Maria and Eleonora, followed in 1441.²¹ At the so-called "Parliament of San Lorenzo," held in February 1443, Alfonso's first meeting with Neapolitan nobles after securing Naples, Ferrante was officially recognized as his successor, despite his illegitimacy. In March that same year, Alfonso solemnly crowned his son with the regalia of duke of Calabria, while, in the bull of 15 July 1444, the Venetian pope, Eugenius IV, "regularized" Ferrante's illegitimate birth and sanctioned his right to inherit Alfonso's kingdom.²²

Ferrante's early education was exclusively Spanish, apart for a possible early contact with the young Neapolitan, Diomede Carafa (1406–87), who had accompanied Alfonso d'Aragona back to Spain in 1423 and remained in his service until the king's death in 1458.²³ Even after his arrival in Italy, Ferrante's intellectual and physical education remained under the direction of his Catalan tutor, while his spiritual advisor and senior members of his household were all Spanish. Pontieri writes that Ferrante's early Spanish education "lasciò un'impronta talmente incisiva nel suo carattere e nei suoi gusti" [left a very deep impression on his character and his tastes]. Like his father before him, Ferrante was never completely comfortable with the Italian language, preferring to speak to his closest confidants in Catalan or Castilian, and, when he had to write in his own hand, using a hybrid mixture of Spanish and Neapolitan dialect, "in

²⁰ Pontieri, *Per la storia*, 24–25; .Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous*, 123. The marriage between Alfonso and his wife, Maria, had remained childless after almost ten years; see Pontieri, *Per la storia*, 22–23. In 1444 Alfonso had Geraldona, together with her husband, Gaspare Revertit, and her mother, Isabella, brought to Naples and housed in the Castel Capuano with an annual pension of 600 ducats. This would appear to have been part of his plan to have Ferrante legitimized.

²¹ In 1443, Maria was given in marriage to Leonello d'Este, marquis of Ferrara and in 1444, Eleonora was married to Marino Marzano, eldest son of the powerful baron, the Duke of Sessa; see Pontieri, 60–61.

²² Pontieri, *Per la storia* 23, n. 19, and 57. In the *bolla*, Ferrante was declared "coniugato genitus et coniugata" [born of a husband and a wife].

²³ Pontieri, *Per la storia*, 33.

uno stile rozzo, asintattico, affatto personale” [in a rough, ungrammatical, and truly personal, style].²⁴

Although Ferrante was accused by his contemporaries, and by some modern scholars, of neglecting cultural pursuits in favour of the physical pleasures of hunting and falconry, Bentley argues that it was simply that the “patterns of patronage changed” during Ferrante’s rule.²⁵ His passion for the hunt, particularly falconry, had been inherited from his father, contemporary letters revealing that they shared this passion with most of their fellow rulers, and indeed that hunting parties and the exchange of falcons and hounds had become an integral part of diplomacy.²⁶

Ferrante enriched Alfonso’s collection of classical texts with vernacular translations rather than Latin compositions. De Marinis identified and described 142 of the manuscripts commissioned by Ferrante, who also employed more than thirty scribes to copy other works.²⁷ His collection was enlarged by at least 260 manuscripts and printed books that he confiscated from the libraries of rebellious barons in 1486. While not as enamoured with classical studies as his father had been, Ferrante brought many humanist scholars to Naples albeit for less esoteric positions, re-opening the *Studio* in Naples in 1465 and employing resident humanists such as Porcellio Pandoni and Iuniano Maio as teachers. Giovanni Pontano became secretary to Ippolita Maria

²⁴ Pontieri, *Per la storia*, 35.

²⁵ Bentley, 63–64.

²⁶ Ryder, *The Kingdom of Naples*, 71–74. Kruse writes that hunting and its accoutrements were described by humanist writers as important manifestations of princely magnificence, citing Giovanni Pontano’s *De magnificentia*, and also Iuniano Maio’s *De maiestate*, dedicated to Ferrante, in which hunting is second only to horsemanship in the display of royal magnificence; see Jeremy Kruse, “Hunting, Magnificence and the Court of Leo X,” *Renaissance Studies* 7 (1993): 244–45; and Iuniano Maio, *De maiestate: inedite del sec. XV*, ed. Franco Gaeta, Scelta di curiosità letterarie inedite o rare dal secolo XIII al XIX, disp. 250 (Bologna: Commissione per i Testi di Lingua, 1956), 230–31. Kruse also describes a medal designed for Alfonso by Pisanello, on the reverse of which a boar-hunting scene bears the motto *Venator Intrepidus* [Fearless Hunter]; see Kruse, 252. In correspondence between Ferrante and Ercole d’Este, after his marriage to Eleonora had been formalised, frequent references are made to the exchange of particularly desirable falcons; see, for example ASMo, Cancelleria estense, Estero, Carteggio di Principi e Signorie, Naples–Sicily, busta 1, letter from Ferrante I to Ercole d’Este, Naples, 18 November [1472].

²⁷ Tammaro de Marinis, *La biblioteca napoletana dei re d’Aragona*, 4 vols. (Milan: Hoepli, 1947–52), 1: 41–70, 74–75, n. 29.

Sforza in 1474, and later to Ferrante himself, while between 1482 and 1484, and again in 1492, he acted as Ferrante's peace negotiator with the papacy. Giovanni Albino was originally the duke of Calabria's secretary, before becoming a diplomat, while Antonio de Ferrariis, known as Galateo, became Ferrante's physician, after graduating in medicine in Ferrara.²⁸

Ferrante's taste for the display of magnificence was also at odds with the sober tastes of his father. While Alfonso had dressed with Augustan severity in black, his son preferred the latest fashions from France, Spain and Italy, delighting in the display of elegance and luxury in fabrics and accessories.²⁹ Ferrante's love of luxury and opulence was reflected in the style of his court, while days of jousting, tourneys and *caroselli*, in which Ferrante himself would often participate, extended the king's love of *magnificentia* into more public spaces, where it was intended to impress both his own subjects and visiting foreign dignitaries.³⁰

Eleonora's Early Life in Naples

Since Eleonora's name does not appear in contemporary Neapolitan chronicles, apart from the announcement of her birth in 1450 and her marriage to Ercole d'Este in 1473, and rarely in surviving documents, it has to be assumed that Eleonora received an education which was an appropriate preparation for her future role as the consort of

²⁸ Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 151–52.

²⁹ Pontieri describes the fashions worn at Ferrante's court: "Pellicce varie, di finissima qualità, mantelli di velluto di fogge e colori differenti, calzature dorate di confezione spagnola, gonells ricamati e giornee nei drappi più vari delle manifatture francesi e fiamminghe, cappelli e berretti napoletani, cappucci, papafigos e guanti in doviziosa profusione, e poi gioielli e ninnoli d'oro, fra cui, scintillanti, i sitis perillos – la 'sedia ardente' insegna della casa d'Aragona" [Various furs of the finest quality, velvet cloaks in different styles and colours, gilded footwear made in Spain, embroidered vests and tunics in more varied fabrics made in France and Flanders, Neapolitan hats and caps, hoods, woollen helmets and gloves in rich profusion, and then jewels and gold trinkets, among which, flashing, the siege perilous – the "burning seat" symbol of the house of Aragon]; see Pontieri, *Per la storia*, 74.

³⁰ Ferrante's betrothal to Isabella da Chiaromonte in 1444 had been accompanied by the spectacle of tournaments between Spanish and Neapolitan knights, at which Ferrante distinguished himself with feats of chivalrous courage and dexterity; see Pontieri, *Per la storia*, 64–65, 100–01.

a prince.³¹ Pontieri suggests that her mother, Isabella da Chiaromonte, “attendeva di persona all’educazione dei figli” [personally looked after the education of her children],³² which would imply that, at least until her mother’s death when Eleonora was fifteen, her education had been much influenced by what Pontano described as Isabella’s “mirabile amore di pudicizia e di continenza” [amazing love of chastity and self-restraint] and her dedication “alla religione non senza alcunchè di superstizioso” [to religion not without a trace of superstition].³³

Somewhat of a contrast to the aura of chaste religiosity which surrounded Eleonora’s upbringing was the well-documented humanist education which her sister-in-law, Ippolita Maria Sforza, had received in Milan under the tutelage of Baldo Martorelli, a pupil of Vittorino da Feltre.³⁴ The unusual extent of Ippolita Maria’s intellectual superiority gained her the description, “tu acumine ingenij, et litterarum studijs; quae raro in vestro sexu elucet” [your intellectual ability and study of letters, rare among your sex, shine forth]. by the bishop of Gaeta, Francesco Patrizi, in the oration he delivered at her proxy wedding in Milan on 18 May 1465.³⁵ The Sforza women were renowned for the liberality of their education, Clough describing that of Ippolita Maria’s cousin, Battista Sforza (1446–72), who became the second wife of Federigo da Montefeltro, at the court of Milan between 1450 to 1457.³⁶ Battista Sforza’s life in Pesaro, after her return from Milan, is described in two letters, dated 9 and 10 April 1458, from her personal physician, Benedetto de’ Reguardati, to

³¹ Passero, 25 and 29; Notar Giacomo, 92.

³² Pontieri, *Per la storia*, 67.

³³ Croce, “Due letterine familiari,” 298.

³⁴ Judith Bryce, “‘Fa finire uno bello studio,’” 56–61; Southern, Eileen, “A Prima Ballerina of the Fifteenth Century,” in *Music and Context: Essays for John M. Ward*, ed. Anne Dhu Shapiro (Cambridge, Mass.: Dept. of Music, Harvard University, 1985), 184–85; Evelyn Welch, “Between Milan and Naples: Ippolita Maria Sforza, duchess of Calabria,” in *The French Descent*, 124–26.

³⁵ Bryce, “Fa finire uno bello studio,” 58.

³⁶ Cecil H. Clough, “Daughters and Wives of the Montefeltro: Outstanding Bluestockings of the Quattrocento,” *Renaissance Studies* 10 (1996): 31–55 (40–41).

Bianca Maria Visconti in Milan. The life which Reguardati describes may to some extent be taken as a model for that of other young aristocratic girls, albeit those with a particularly intellectual disposition, destined to become wives of foreign princes. It consists of a daily routine of attendance at Mass in the palace chapel, followed by intellectual pursuits, and then lessons with a dancing master, Guglielmo Ebreo, whose subject was “a requisite at court, particularly to celebrate betrothals and nuptials <as> dancing displayed most effectively a girl’s grace and beauty, both important considerations for bringing marriage negotiations to a satisfactory conclusion.”³⁷

In a letter to Bianca Maria Visconti, dated 15 July 1466, the same Guglielmo Ebreo reveals that he was teaching both Eleonora and her sister, Beatrice, to dance. When Bianca Maria sought his services, he was forced to reply: “I believe that Your Excellency must know that I am with His Majesty the king, inasmuch as he sent to His Lordship Messer Alessandro (Sforza, Lord of Pesaro) that I was to come and teach Madonna Eleonora, his daughter, and Madonna Beatrice, to dance in the Lombard style.”³⁸ Clearly, Ferrante had arranged for both his daughters to learn to dance “allo lombardo,” whether this was because he was still intending to send Eleonora to her husband in Milan, or because he had been inspired by the accomplishments of Ippolita Maria. She had apparently already excelled in singing and dancing before she arrived in Naples in September 1465, and it was reported that, “la Maestà de Re non ave altro piacere ne altro paradiso non pare che trova se non quando la vede danzare e anche canthare” [His Majesty the king does not have any other pleasure nor does he appear

³⁷ Clough, “Daughters and Wives,” 41.

³⁸ Sparti quotes this letter in her paper on the role of dance at fifteenth-century courts, adding that the letter appears to no longer exist; see Barbara Sparti, “The Function and Status of Dance in the Fifteenth-Century Italian Courts,” *Dance Research* 14 (1996): 42–61 (54, n.11). Atlas suggests that Guglielmo had travelled to Naples with Ippolita Maria Sforza in 1465; see Allan W. Atlas, *Music at the Aragonese Court of Naples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 103.

to find another heaven than when he sees her dance and also sing].³⁹ Guglielmo stayed in Naples for a further two years, apparently teaching the ladies of the court to dance.

Possibly because of the influence of her mother, Eleonora did not know Latin, as we are told in two *epithalamia* [wedding orations], delivered at the public celebrations of her marriage to Ercole d'Este in Naples in May 1473. These orations, which both survive in manuscript form, are by Ferrante's resident orator, Giovanni Brancati, the other by Ludovico Carbone, who had travelled to Naples from Ferrara with Sigismondo d'Este's party, giving addresses to civic leaders at centres along the way.⁴⁰ D'Elia describes these fifteenth-century wedding orations in terms of their propagandist nature and their aim to promote "ideals and particular attributes in brides that were not usually present in earlier conceptions of marriage.⁴¹ In his address, delivered in Naples in the presence of Ferrante on the eve of Eleonora's departure for Ferrara, 23 May 1473, Giovanni Brancati, described Eleonora's education:

Not only is she of almost divine beauty and figure, she has been educated in all the accomplishments in which it is appropriate that noble women be educated. She is familiar with everything worthwhile, be it either a manual skill or an intellectual undertaking. In literature, she decided to content herself with a knowledge of reading and writing in the vulgar tongue because she thought that Latin does not become a

³⁹ Atlas, 103.

⁴⁰ Giovanni Brancati, *Oratio habita Neapoli in nuptiis Helionorae regis Ferdinandi filiae anno 1473 die 23 mense Mai*, Valencia, Biblioteca Universitaria, MS cod. 808, ff. 25v–42v; and Ludovico Carbone, *Epithalamium Neapoli actum in divam leonoram Aragonensem et dvum Herculem estensem*, London, British Library, MS Add. 20,794, ff. 1r–30r. The London manuscript also contains Carbone's addresses in Bologna, Florence, Siena and that to Sixtus IV in Rome. The wedding oration previously attributed to Giovanni Marco Cinico is no more than a copy of that of Brancati, although both Corradini and Cox refer to Giovanni Marco Cinico as the author of a wedding oration composed for the marriage of Eleonora d'Aragona and Ercole d'Este (*Oratio ferrariae habita dum nuptiae Eleonorae Aragonae cum Hercule Ferrariae duce anno 1473 celebrarentur*, Modena, Biblioteca Universitaria Estense, MS lat. 192); this corrects Elena Corradini, "Medallic Portraits of the Este: *effigies ed vivum expressae*," in *The Image of the Individual: portraits in the Renaissance*, ed. Nicholas Mann and Luke Syson (London: British Museum Press, 1998), 30, n. 59; and Virginia Cox, "Gender and Eloquence in Ercole de Roberti's *Portia and Brutus*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 62 (2009): 78, n. 47. Bentley describes Cinico as a copyist in the royal library in Naples; see Bentley, 218, 220.

⁴¹ Anthony D'Elia, *The Renaissance of Marriage in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 51–83.

chaste woman, who should neither do anything indecorous nor even hear or read anything of the sort.⁴²

While Eleonora's lack of knowledge of classical Latin was considered appropriate to her training as a virtuous wife, a *mulier pudica*, untainted by the sexual references common in classical authors, Brancati had earlier in the same oration praised her younger sister, Beatrice, for her own classical learning, writing: "Let no one think that I am forgetting Beatrix: although she is still young, she has through her abilities achieved everything that the daughter of a royal house can achieve. She is even able to speak and write Latin of rare elegance".⁴³ This implies that Beatrice, being seven years younger than Eleonora, had had a more enlightened education than her sister, spending correspondingly less time in the presence of their deeply pious mother. It has also been suggested that Eleonora was tutored by Diomede Carafa, who did not know Latin and always wrote in the vernacular. Despite her own lack of a classical education in her youth, in later life Eleonora appreciated its value, having Carafa's treatise on good government translated into Latin in order to make it accessible to a wider audience.⁴⁴

Cox suggests that Eleonora's lack of a classical education does not imply "that she had no pretensions to eloquence", citing two letters to her from a Neapolitan noblewoman of high rank and court connections, Ceccarella, or Francesca, Minutolo.⁴⁵ Cox writes that these letters "demonstrate very clearly the level of vernacular rhetorical competence possessed by some noblewomen within the Neapolitan cultural sphere."

⁴² "Quae praeter pulchritudinem et formam prope divinam: artes omnes est edocta quas ingenuas mulieres edoceri consentaneum est: ut plane nihil ignoret laudabile: quod vel manu confici possit vel ingenio excogitari: praeter litteras quarum scientia illa vulgari legendi scribendique: contenta esse voluit quod latinam non decere pudicam mulierem putavit quae non modo non facere sed nec audire quidem aut legere quodcumque indecorum debet"; see Brancati, *Oratio* 41v-r; translation David Fairservice.

⁴³ "Nemo me oblivisci putet Beatricis quae etsi aetate adhuc pene inmaturo sit: omnia tamen ingenio est affecuta que regiam filiam assequi possibile sit: ut ne latine quidem et loqui et scribere quam elegantissime nesciat," Brancati, *Oratio*, 37v-38r; translation David Fairservice.

⁴⁴ Diomede Carafa, "I doveri del principe" in *Memoriali*, ed. Franca Petrucci Nardelli (Rome: Bonacci, 1988), 97-209.

⁴⁵ Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy 1400-1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 14-15 and Virginia Cox, "Gender and Eloquence in Ercole de'Roberti's *Portia and Brutus*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 62 (2009): 61-101 (79).

Minutolo's *Lettere* were evidently collected for circulation to a select manuscript audience, and she seems to have enjoyed a certain degree of fame as a writer, with allusions to her in other letters of the period, under the classicizing pseudonyms of "sybilla Minutola" or "sybilla Parthenopea."⁴⁶

Masuccio Salernitano's *Il novellino* gives some hint of how Eleonora was perceived at the court in Naples as a young woman.⁴⁷ Masuccio dedicated each of his fifty *novelle* to a different "personaggio più o meno autorevole della famiglia reale o della corte aragonese" [a more or less influential member of the royal family or the Aragonese court], suggesting that both the *novella* itself and the dedicatory words which prefaced it had some relevance to the character of the person to whom it was dedicated. The thirty-first story, which is dedicated to Eleonora, is the sad tale of two lovers, whose decision to elope had resulted in his murder and her suicide. Masuccio writes that he has dedicated this pitiful tale to her, "più ch'altra madonna de umanità e compassionevole carità vestita" [rather than to any other lady clothed in humanity and compassionate kindness], because:

tu leggendo, e altre ascoltando, da compassione vinte, alcuna pietosa lacrimetta spargendo, me persuade che non piccolo refrigerio ne senteranno de dui giovenetti amanti le misere anime quali penso che ne le eterne fiamme siano criciate de l'altrui li infelici, avversi e orribili casi, da umanità siamo costretti a dovergli con le nostre più amare lacrime ne le loro miserie piangendo accompagnare" [by your reading it, and others listening, overcome with pity, shedding a few merciful tears, I persuade myself that not a little comfort will be felt by the sad souls of the two young lovers who I think are tormented by eternal flames].⁴⁸

Although his dedication is very clearly couched in the stylized and formulaic words of

⁴⁶ For the collected letters of Minutolo, see Ceccarella Minutolo, *Lettere*, ed. Raffaele Morabito (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1999).

⁴⁷ Masuccio Salernitano, *Il novellino*, ed. Roberto di Marco (Bologna: Sanpietro, 1968). The author's real name was Tommaso de' Guardati, his use of Salernitano a tribute to Roberto Sanseverino, prince of Salerno, who was his employer and patron.

⁴⁸ Salernitano, 227.

a courtier seeking royal patronage, Eleonora's reputation for kindness and understanding was a recurring theme throughout her marriage to Ercole d'Este.

Marriage to Sforza Maria Sforza

A dual marriage alliance between Naples and Milan forged in 1455 was the occasion for Eleonora's name to be mentioned in an exchange of letters between those two states. The marriages, between Eleonora and Sforza Maria Sforza, and between Alfonso d'Aragona and Ippolita Maria Sforza, had been the idea of Francesco Sforza, whose position as duke of Milan had been validated in April 1454 by the signing of the Treaty of Lodi, ending years of hostilities between Milan and Venice. In August that same year he had been an early signatory of a twenty-five year non-aggression pact, known variously as the *Lega universale* or *Lega generale* [Italian League], composed originally of Milan, Venice and Florence, and later including all the smaller Italian states. Although at first Alfonso I of Naples had not been asked to join, Sforza had successfully argued that without the participation of Naples it would be impossible to exclude foreign interference in the internal politics of Italy. Naples joined the League in April 1455, following the lead of Pope Nicholas V who had joined the previous February. This meant that the League was at least nominally representative of the interests of all the states of Italy.⁴⁹

In July 1455, marriage negotiations between Milan and Naples commenced, conducted by Antonio da Trezzo, the Milanese ambassador in Naples, and Francesco Sforza's special envoy, Alberico Maletta.⁵⁰ In a coded letter to Sforza, dated 26 July 1455, Maletta made clear that Alfonso had earlier reservations about Eleonora's

⁴⁹ Vincent Ilardi, "The Italian League, Francesco Sforza, and Charles VII (1454–1461)," *Studies in the Renaissance* 6 (1959): 129–66 (143).

⁵⁰ Vincent Ilardi, "Towards the *Tragedia d'Italia*: Ferrante and Galeazzo Maria Sforza, friendly enemies and hostile allies," in *The French Descent*, 95.

marriage to Sforza Maria Sforza:

Et poso molte parole la sua Majestà dise che *quamvis* el potesse maridare questa puta molto bene, *maxime* fora de Italia, et per bene, *etiam* luy fosse Re et nasciuto de Casa Reale, *tamen* considerato el vostro grande valore et la excellentia de vostra signoria et per più intrinsecarsi con voy era contento de fare questi doi parentadi. [After much discussion, His Majesty said that yet even though he could marry this little girl very well, especially outside Italy, and even though he was a king and born of a royal house, nevertheless in view of Your Lordship's great value and excellence, and to bond himself to you, he was happy to contract these two marriages].⁵¹

Opposition to the marriages came from Calixtus III, a Borgia pope, who as bishop of Valencia had been a close friend of Alfonso I, and who, it had been reasonably assumed, would favour the king's interests after his elevation to the papacy in March 1455. However, within months of his election, Calixtus had fallen out with Alfonso over the king's support for attacks on the papal states by the *condottiere*, Jacopo Piccinino.⁵² In retaliation, Calixtus rejected most of the king's demands, including the confirmation of his investiture as king of Naples, and of Ferrante as his successor. The marriage alliances with Milan, which would ensure that Alfonso I had a powerful ally in Francesco Sforza, further soured relations between the two men.⁵³ In a letter, dated 9 September 1455, Giacomo Calcaterra, the Milanese ambassador to the papal court, referred to Calixtus III's continued opposition to the proposed marriages, even after he had suggested to the pontiff that he might like to act as a mediator in the marriage negotiations, as the alliances would serve "per aparturire eterna pace a tuta Italia" [to deliver eternal peace to all of Italy].⁵⁴ When Calixtus refused to change his mind, Sforza

⁵¹ Carlo Canetta, "Le sponsalie di casa Sforza con casa d'Aragona (giugno–ottobre 1455)," *Archivio storico lombardo*, 9 (1882): 136–44 (137) and 10 (1883): 769–82. In this and subsequent passages cited from Canetta, I have added capitals, orthosyntactical punctuation and accents.

⁵² Ilardi, "The Italian League," 145–46. So great was the conflict between Alfonso and Calixtus that Cosimo de' Medici thought that it "to be a camouflage for a Catalan conspiracy to dominate the entire peninsula".

⁵³ Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous*, 407–11.

⁵⁴ Canetta, 9 (1882): 139–40.

decided to proceed with the marriages without papal assent.⁵⁵

Despite the continued opposition of Calixtus, on 6 October 1455 Alberico Maletta wrote to Francesco Sforza, advising him that the marriages would be made public in Naples within the week amid great festivities. Ferrante, then duke of Calabria, although confined to bed through illness, signed the marriage documents at Castelnuovo on 12 October 1455 and they were ratified by Alfonso in a public ceremony the following day.⁵⁶ Francesco Sforza wrote to Naples on 26 October 1455 to express his satisfaction at the successful outcome, predicting that the celebrations in Milan would be even greater than those in Naples, “perché tucta Italia et tutto el mundo cognosca che nuy ne habiamo quello piacere et consolatione et gaudio che havemo dicto” [because the whole of Italy and the whole world knows that we have from it that pleasure and consolation and joy of which we have spoken].⁵⁷ The anonymous Neapolitan chronicler had the last word on the successful conclusion of the alliance with Milan, “La Maestà de Re de Rahona sta in Napole et triumpha più hogi che mai” [His Majesty the King of Aragon is in Naples and today is more triumphant than ever].⁵⁸ Among the terms of the contract was the size of Eleonora’s dowry, 40,000 ducats to be paid two months before she went to join her husband, and a “certa intrata annuale,” [certain annual income], so that she might live “honorevolmente” [with honour] at her husband’s court.⁵⁹

When Alfonso I died in June 1458 from a lung infection contracted during a winter hunting expedition, Calixtus staunchly refused to accept Ferrante as the king’s legitimate heir, although the principle of his succession was among the terms of the

⁵⁵ Canetta, 10 (1883): 778.

⁵⁶ Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous*, 411.

⁵⁷ Canetta, 9 (1882): 144.

⁵⁸ Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous*, 411; *Diurnali detti del Duca di Monteleone*, ed. Federico Faraglia (Naples: Tipografia F. Giannini, 1895), 139.

⁵⁹ Nicola Ferorelli, “Il ducato di Bari sotto Sforza Maria Sforza e Ludovico il Moro,” *Archivio storico lombardo* ser. 5, 1 (1914): 389–468 (390).

Italian League.⁶⁰ His own death, some forty days later, was all that prevented Calixtus from installing one of his nephews as king of Naples.⁶¹ By contrast, the new pope, Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, who reigned as Pius II, was sympathetic to Ferrante, who was crowned king of Naples by Cardinal Latino Orsini, archbishop of Bari, at Barletta in 1459.

Ferrante's legitimacy had next been challenged by the Angevin pretender, René d'Anjou, supported by rebellious Neapolitan barons, and it was not until the middle of 1465 that Ferrante, at the age of forty-two, was able to confirm his position as the legitimate king of Naples. The letter which the Milanese ambassador, Antonio da Trezzo, wrote to Francesco Sforza on 7 July 1465, describing Ferrante's sense of relief at that point, helps to explain the king's harsh treatment of all future opposition to his authority. The ambassador reports the king's speech verbatim:

Antonio, tu sai in che extremità me hay veduto doppo che mori la bona memoria del Signor Re mio patre; io non ho voluto de tornargli un'altra volta, et però penso, cerco et spero assicurarmi per talle modo che questo mio regno che né mi, né i miei figlioli, né li figlioli dei miei figlioli habiano ad trovarsi in quello che me sono trovato io [Antonio, you know in what dire state you saw me after the death of my father, the king, of happy memory; I did not want to go back there again, and therefore I think, I try and I hope to secure this kingdom of mine by such means that neither I, nor my children, nor the children of my children will have to find themselves in that position in which I found myself].⁶²

It was the middle of March 1465, before Ferrante's younger son, Federico, was able to set out for Milan, to act as his brother's proxy in his marriage to Ippolita Maria Sforza and to escort her back to Naples.⁶³ In late May 1465, after the wedding festivities in Milan and Pavia, Ippolita Maria's vast retinue and 150 heavily-laden mules set out for

⁶⁰ Ryder, *Alfonso the Magnanimous*, 424–30.

⁶¹ Ilardi, "The Italian League," 145–46.

⁶² Dover, "Royal Diplomacy," 60.

⁶³ Born in 1452, Federico d'Aragona was only thirteen when he set out on this long and hazardous journey.

Naples, a journey which was to take over three months.⁶⁴ With her travelled her brothers, Filippo Maria and Eleonora's future husband, Sforza Maria. At Reggio the party was treated with "grande honore" [great honour] by Borso d'Este, while in Bologna Ippolita Maria visited the shrine of Santa Caterina Vigri in the convent of Corpus Domini, placing a ducal coronet on the saint's head to honour the memory of Queen Isabella.⁶⁵ In Florence the bride and her party were honourably entertained by Lorenzo de' Medici.⁶⁶ After the party's progress was halted for many weeks in Siena by the murder of the bride's brother-in-law, Jacopo Piccinino, allegedly on the orders of Ferrante, Ippolita Maria finally reached Aversa, a half-day's ride from Naples, on 14 September 1465.⁶⁷

The nineteenth-century Milanese historian, Carlo Canetta, cites a letter, from Filippo Maria and Sforza Maria Sforza to their father in Milan, in which the brothers described the arrival of Ippolita Maria's party outside Naples on 14 September 1465.⁶⁸ At the same time as this letter paints a vivid picture of the party's protocol-driven welcome by Ferrante and their triumphal procession through the city, it is also a very personal account, attentive to the emotional responses of all those concerned. The young men present their father with a very positive picture of their welcome to Naples, clearly wishing to please him with their account and to assure him of how honourably their sister has been received by her new family and future subjects. As the brothers move from one encounter to the next, they manage to convey a sense of the kindness and consideration with which Eleonora had greeted her new sister-in-law:

⁶⁴ Bryce, " 'Fa finire uno bello studio' ," 55–56.

⁶⁵ *Diario ferrarese*, 191; Wormald, 130.

⁶⁶ With the exception of the period of the Pazzi War, they were to remain in contact until the end of Ippolita Maria's life in 1484; see Bryce "Between Friends," 340–65.

⁶⁷ Evelyn Welch, "between Milan and Naples: Ippolita Maria Sforza, duchess of Calabria" in *The French Descent*: 123–36 (126).

⁶⁸ See n. 52 above; Canetta (1883), 780–82. See Appendix Document 1 for a complete transcription and translation of this letter.

Incontrate tutte due insieme, Madonna Elionora tochò et basiò la mano ad donna nostra sorella, et ley basò donna Elionora per mezo la bocha, et madonna Elionora un altra fiata tochò la mano ad domina Duchessa, et cossi cavalcasemo un pezo, tenendo le signorie loro continuamente le mano loro iuncte insieme, perchè domina Elionora non haviva cavallo che andasse bene a suo modo, domina duchessa la fece montare suso uno di soy” [As the two of them met, the Lady Eleonora touched and kissed the hand of our lady sister and she kissed the Lady Eleonora on the mouth, and Lady Eleonora again touched and kissed the hand of Her Ladyship the duchess, and thus we rode a little further, with the ladies continuing to hold hands, [and] since the lady Eleonora did not have a horse which walked well in this fashion, the Lady duchess had her mount one of hers].

This letter is highly significant as it contains the first textual reference to Eleonora d’Aragona as a real person, rather than as the depersonalised trophy bride of the marriage negotiations of 1455. The young men gave special attention to the arrival of Eleonora’s party in their midst because it was so unexpected, suggesting that she had been so excited about meeting Ippolita Maria for the first time that she had decided not to wait for them to arrive at Aversa :

Anzi ché fossemo fora de la terra suso una contrada larga scontrassemo Madonna Elionora et la mogliera del ducha de Malfi sua sorella⁶⁹ con qualche LX donne, tutte vestite de bruna o berettino o morello al habito neapolitano e con il mantello ale spalle. Madonna Elionora era la prima, vestita de una camora de drappo d’oro morello,⁷⁰ et una turcha de velluto morello de sopra et una cathena d’oro a parecchie fille al collo, como è quella che porta domino Antonio Cicinello. [Before we reached the city, on the main road, we encountered the Lady Eleonora and the wife of the duke of Amalfi, her sister, with some sixty ladies, all dressed in brown or dark grey or black in the Neapolitan manner, with cloaks around their shoulders. Lady Eleonora was first, dressed in a gown

⁶⁹ Maria d’Aragona, natural daughter of Ferrante, who married Antonio Todeschini Piccolomini, nephew of Pius II, and was created the first duke of Amalfi; see George L. Williams, *Papal Genealogy: the Families and Descendants of the Popes* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004), 50.

⁷⁰ Frick writes that the wearing of black was not a sign of wealth and refinement in Italy at large until Eleonora married Ercole d’Este; see Carole Collier Frick, *Dressing Renaissance Florence: Families, Fortunes, and Fine Clothing* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 175. The diarist, Notar Giacomo, writes that, by contrast, Ippolita Maria was dressed “in colore de azuro” [in sky blue]; see Notar Giacomo, 7.

of gold and black fabric, and a long coat of black velvet over it, and a gold chain of several strands around her neck, like that which Lord Antonio Cicinello wears.]⁷¹

Although there is no reference here to the fact that Eleonora was the bride of one of the writers and that they also were seeing each other for the first time, the letter is eloquent in its descriptions of the pleasure that Eleonora took from her first meeting with her new sister-in-law, of the friendliness of her welcome and of the affectionate way in which the two girls treated each other as they rode side by side, holding hands all the time. The brothers' observations of Eleonora's warm and affectionate demeanour, and the enthusiasm with which she approached the arrival of the Milanese party, will later be echoed by members of Ercole's delegation in Naples for the proxy wedding in 1473.

The brothers' descriptions of the party's meeting with Ferrante, who was accompanied by the Cardinal of Ravenna and Alessandro Sforza, make it obvious how strictly it was dictated by the rules of precedence.⁷² Ferrante had ridden a mile outside the walls of Naples to meet them, a considerable concession on his part, possibly inspired by his genuine affection for the bride's father. However, it was Ippolita Maria and her brothers who dismounted first, followed by Alessandro Sforza, after he had whispered his intentions in Ferrante's ear. He had then approached Eleonora, presumably as his nephew's bride, and embraced her; next, Ippolita Maria and her brothers had approached Ferrante on foot, whereupon he also had dismounted and walked towards them. Kneeling, Ippolita Maria had touched, then kissed, the king's hand, then that of the Cardinal, who still had not dismounted. This was the cue for

⁷¹ Canetta, 10 (1883), 780–82. Antonio Cicinello was Ferrante's ambassador in Milan; see Ilardi, "Towards the *Tragedia d'Italia*," 95.

⁷² Alessandro Sforza, Lord of Pesaro, was their uncle, being the brother of the duke of Milan, who had sent him to Naples to negotiate with Ferrante for the release of Piccinino. The Cardinal of Ravenna was the Ferrarese prelate, Bartolomeo Roverella, who had been created cardinal on 18 December 1461 by Pius II. He had been Papal Legate in Naples since 1464 and had supported Ferrante in his war against the Angevins. His brother, Lorenzo, became Bishop of Ferrara in 1462, and officiated at the wedding of Ercole and Eleonora in Ferrara in July 1473.

the whole party to be “abracciati et baxiati amorevelmente” [embraced and kissed affectionately] by Ferrante.

Their entry into Naples had also followed a strict hierarchical order. Trumpeters and pipers led the way, followed by fifteen pairs of Milanese and Neapolitan nobles, twelve pairs of bishops, the heralds and mace bearers, and the senior barons of the *Regno* ahead of Alessandro Sforza and the ambassadors of Venice, Florence and others. The brothers then preceded Ippolita Maria, who had Cardinal Roverella on her left, Eleonora and all the ladies of the court, and lastly the king himself. Once all were inside the city walls, a “baldecchino de drappo d’oro grande” [a canopy of gold fabric] awaited, under which the cardinal, the king and Ippolita Maria entered, and thus they made their way to the Castel Capuano where the bride was to pass the night. At mid afternoon (“XXI hore”), the cardinal and the ambassadors accompanied her into the castle, with Ferrante taking her to the door of her apartments before withdrawing to confirm the dowry provisions. In the late afternoon (“alle hore XXIIJ”), “fu facto l’instrumento de la dotte et la protexta de le cose donate de verbo ad verbum como se contene in le minute portate da Milano’ [the dotal agreement was prepared and the declaration of the gifts, word for word as contained in the drafts brought from Milan], although Ferrante had felt it necessary to suggest that “dicto instrumento in alcune cose era fora del ordine che se observava qui” [in several things the agreement was not in the order which was observed here].

The marriage of Eleonora to Sforza was clearly of secondary importance, eliciting only one line from the brothers: “pocho poso, cioè ad hore XXIIIIJ fo contracto el matrimonio de mi Sforza con Madama Elionora” [a little later, that is at sundown, the marriage of me, Sforza, with Madama Eleonora was contracted]. The boys completed their letter to their father with a description of their lovely sister before her wedding,

their feelings of fraternal pride unmistakable:

Madonna duchessa haveva in dosso el vestito de damaschino brochato con le maniche strette, con il lavaro allistato; haveva in testa la ghirlanda de perle, el balasso grande in fronte, li duy da canto, un altro in pecto, et un altro suso la spalla; faceva un bel vedere. [My Lady the Duchess wore a gown of damask brocade with tight sleeves, decorated with needlework; she wore on her head the garland of pearls, the large *balasso* in front, two on the sides, another on her breast, and yet another on her shoulder. She made a lovely sight.]

Ferorelli describes the circumstances which surrounded the special privileges which would accrue to Sforza Maria after his marriage to Eleonora, revealing the extent to which Ferrante had been dependent on Francesco Sforza's support for his success in the war of succession in 1465. Having been comprehensively defeated at the battle of Sarno in 1461 and realizing his total dependence on further Milanese military assistance, early in 1462 Ferrante had written to Sforza, who would have been just thirteen at the time, inviting him to Naples and promising him "talle stato che Vostra Eccellenza ne serà ben contenta" [a state with which Your Excellency will be well pleased].⁷³ His first offer had included the lands in Calabria belonging to the rebel Prince of Rossano, suggesting that even those might in time become a "assai maggiore stato" [much larger state], with the continued support of Francesco Sforza and a successful outcome to the war. When a peace agreement was made with the Prince of Rossano in August 1463, Ferrante had been forced to rethink his offer, although the fortuitous death of Giovanni Antonio Orsini, prince of Taranto, some three months later, enabled him to offer his future son-in-law the duchy of Bari, together with such other lands as he could confiscate from rebel barons.⁷⁴ Francesco Sforza was delighted and made public the concession in Milan. Negotiations continued as to the size and nature of the concession promised to his young son, culminating in

⁷³ Ferorelli, 390.

⁷⁴ Ferorelli, 390–91.

“lo privilegio del dicto ducato” [the charter of the duchy], dated 9 September 1464, conceding to the young Milanese and his heirs of both sexes, “la città di Bari e le terre di Palo e Modugno con i loro castelli, casali, uomini, vassalli, redditi dei vassalli, feudi, feudatari” [the city of Bari and the districts of Palo and Modugno, with their castles, hamlets, men, vassals, vassals’ incomes, fiefs, feudatories], and granting to him the rights and privileges of the title of duke of Bari.⁷⁵ Lubkin writes that, as a duke, Sforza ranked ahead of everyone in the duchy except his mother and his eldest brother, Galeazzo, and that he was consequently “a personage of some political significance and Galeazzo’s residual heir until 1471.”⁷⁶

Sforza was just sixteen years old when his marriage to Eleonora was formalised on 14 September 1465 and, possibly because of that immaturity, the documents included the rather vague stipulation that the union should be consummated “dopo qualche tempo” [some time later] in Milan.⁷⁷ Although Eleonora herself was only fifteen, she was obviously more mature and apparently quite enthusiastic about the marriage. In another letter to his father, written four days later, Filippo Maria Sforza described Eleonora’s impatience to see her young bridegroom, so that “andò cento volte alle fenestre per vedere se Sforza veneva et haveva dispiacere perchè non veneva cossì presto” [she went a hundred times to the windows to see if Sforza was coming and wasn’t pleased that he wasn’t coming soon enough].⁷⁸ With some ribald humour at his brother’s expense, he suggested that Eleonora was anxious for “pur qualchune de le carezone vede fare alcuna volta dal duca de Calabria alla duchessa” [even a few of the long embraces which she saw the duke of Calabria give from time to time to the

⁷⁵ Ferorelli, 395.

⁷⁶ Gregory Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court: Milan under Galeazzo Maria Sforza* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1994).

⁷⁷ Ferorelli, 426.

⁷⁸ Ferorelli, 426.

duchess], although “lo illustrissimo Sforza non le può ancora fare tanto grosse per l’età che non gli corresponde” [the illustrious Sforza cannot make such large shows of affection yet, as he is just not up to it on account of his age].⁷⁹

The investiture of Sforza as duke of Bari took place in Naples on 22 September 1465,⁸⁰ and it was intended that he should then visit and officially take possession of his territories in Puglia. However, a sudden outbreak of plague caused the planned visit to be abandoned and Sforza returned immediately to Milan with his brother. On 12 October 1465, his kinsman, Azzo Visconti, accepted the governorship of the duchy of Bari on behalf of Sforza at a solemn ceremony in the church of San Nicola in Bari.⁸¹ As early as December 1465, plans were underway for Eleonora to travel to Milan to join her young husband, but these never eventuated and the marriage was never consummated.

Eleonora’s Divorce

Eleonora’s marriage to Sforza advanced no further than the formalities witnessed in Naples in September 1465, as Francesco Sforza died suddenly in early March 1466 and Ferrante’s relationship with his successor, Galeazzo, became worse with every passing week.⁸² It had soon become apparent that the young duke’s character was

⁷⁹ Ferorelli, 426. The marriage of Alfonso and Ippolita Maria had presumably already been consummated. It may also be that Sforza Maria was impotent. Concerning the title and privileges of duke of Bari passing to Ludovico Sforza on Sforza Maria’s death in 1479, Pepe writes “non avendo Sforza Maria lasciato figli ed eredi, per essere rimasto celibe” [Sforza Maria having left no sons and heirs because he remained celibate]; see Ludovico Pepe, *Storia della successione degli Sforzeschi negli Stati di Puglia e Calabria* (Trani: Vecchi, 1900), 17.

⁸⁰ Atlas, 99.

⁸¹ Ferorelli, 400.

⁸² In his biography of Beatrice d’Aragona, Berzeviczy questions Ferrante’s commitment to Eleonora’s marriage to Sforza Maria, revealing that in February 1465 Ferrante had made approaches, via the Venetian Senate, to the recently-widowed Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary, offering Eleonora to him in marriage. These negotiations had come to nothing because “la principessa era stata dipinta come priva di qualsiasi pregio fisico” [the princess had been painted as devoid of any physical merit], and Matthias Corvinus “teneva molto alla bellezza” [set great store on beauty]. Beatrice, seven years younger than Eleonora, and apparently better looking, finally married Corvinus in 1476; see Alberto Berzeviczy, *Beatrice d’Aragona*, ed. Rodolfo Mosca (Milan: Edizioni “Corbaccio,” 1931), 48–49.

markedly different from that of his father and that he felt a particular antipathy for Ferrante. The king had reacted by refusing to send Eleonora on the long journey to Milan and a possibly uncertain future at Galeazzo's court. While the alliance with Milan lived on, albeit precariously, in the union of Ippolita Maria, and Alfonso, duke of Calabria, the two states never again enjoyed diplomatic reciprocity similar to that which had prevailed under Francesco Sforza's stewardship.⁸³

Immediately after Francesco's death, the resident Milanese ambassador in Naples, Antonio da Trezzo wrote to his widow, Bianca Maria Visconti, describing it as "lo dolendissimo et acerbissimo caso de la morte del lume de Italia" [the saddest and most bitter example of the death of the light of Italy], and informing her that Ferrante would commit his total resources to preserving the security of her state, so great was the debt he owed to her husband.⁸⁴

At the age of twenty-two, Galeazzo Sforza was completely unprepared for leadership, with no experience in statecraft, war or diplomacy. When he was sent to France to gain some military experience early in 1466, Francesco Sforza had been forced to chide him for his unprofessional behaviour, even telling him that it was time for him to grow up and take the duties of leadership seriously.⁸⁵ Ilardi describes his character flaws: "profligate spending for luxuries and mistresses, cruelty, impulsiveness

⁸³ This was a notoriously troubled marriage and Ippolita Maria has been described as remaining "a Sforza with Sforza interests to the end"; see Evelyn Welch, "Between Milan and Naples": 121–36. Ferrante, prince of Capua, was born 26 July 1467; see *Una cronaca napoletana figurata del Quattrocento*, ed. Riccardo Filangieri (Naples: L'Arte Tipografia, 1956), 33.

⁸⁴ Paolo Margaroli, "Bianca Maria e Galeazzo Maria Sforza nelle ultime lettere di Antonio da Trezzo (1467–1469)," *Archivio storico lombardo* 111 (1985): 327–77 (330 and 331, n.18). Antonio da Trezzo was a most experienced diplomat, having been Francesco Sforza's representative in Naples since late 1455, during which time he had negotiated the original marriage alliances and facilitated Milanese support for Ferrante during his long struggle against the Angevins and his own rebellious barons. Ilardi suggests that in the process he had become "one of the most intimate advisers of the king; see Ilardi, "Towards the *Tragedia d'Italia*," 95.

⁸⁵ The text of the letter reads: "Et vogli hormay ussire de le cose de pucti et fae le cose de homo, et provedere a li inconvenienti et a le malitie deli mal composti" [And you now need to leave behind the things of boys and do the things of men, and foresee the disadvantages and the ills of the badly organised]; see *Dispatches with Related Documents of Milanese Ambassadors in France and Burgundy, 1450–1483* ed. Paul M. Kendall and Vincent Ilardi, 3 vols. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1970–81), 3: xlvi–xlvii.

and intemperate speech, misguided ambition to outdo his father, especially in his pursuit of the royal crown, indecisiveness in decision making, and above all lack of balance and moderation.”⁸⁶ There was also a considerable age difference, more than twenty years, between Galeazzo and Ferrante. Margaroli has used a three-way correspondence between Galeazzo, his ambassador in Naples, Antonio da Trezzo, and Galeazzo’s mother, Bianca Maria Visconti, to trace the progressive deterioration of relations between Galeazzo and Ferrante, a process which was hastened by perceptions of the young duke’s ill treatment of his mother. The ambassador’s correspondence with Bianca Visconti, who had been “universally respected for her piety, moderation, and wide experience in government,” had commenced in late 1465, after the arrival of Ippolita Maria in Naples.⁸⁷ Then he had been happy to report that her daughter was being treated “come s’ella fosse vera regina, et dico questo, che la regina passata non fo mai visitata et cortegiata appresso ad uno grande pezo come è questa vostra figlia” [as if she were a real queen, and I’ll say this, that the late queen was never visited nor courted nearly as much as is your daughter].⁸⁸

At first Galeazzo had sought merely to isolate his mother from all political decision-making, but the rift between them deepened to the extent that Bianca Maria actually feared for her life. In a lengthy letter, dated 27 April 1467, Antonio da Trezzo alerted her to the problems arising from her son’s difficult nature:

Vostro figliolo è de altra natura che non fo el Signore condan suo patre, et quanti vengono de là tuti affermano questo medesimo et che cum luy bisogna andare cum altra via che non se andava cum el prefato Signore condan suo patre. [Your son’s nature is different from that of the late duke, his father, and everyone who comes from there

⁸⁶ Ilardi, “Towards the *Tragedia d’Italia*,” 92.

⁸⁷ Ilardi, “Towards the *Tragedia d’Italia*,” 93. Swain writes of Bianca Maria: “as the only child of the previous duke of Milan, it was Bianca Maria who made her husband’s title to the state legitimate, and at the same time insisted on her own political role”; see Swain, 177.

⁸⁸ Margaroli, 331.

confirms this and that with him it is necessary to go about things in a different way than happened with that late Lord, his father.]}⁸⁹

Inevitably, the question of Eleonora's marriage to Sforza was raised:

Pare anchora ad quisti che de la parenteza facta fra vuy, ne habiati la migliore parte, perché dicono che vostra figliola aspecta de essere regina et <...> re de questo reame et non se sa che stato, né titulo debba havere Madama Elionora sua primagenita, né suoi figlioli per essere mogliere al vostro terzogenito, la quale hano potuta et poriamo quando volessero maritare in loco che seria regina. [It seems to the people here in Naples that of the marriage alliance between you both, you have the better part, since they say that your daughter expects to be queen and <her son> king of this realm and no one knows what state or title Madama Eleonora, his first-born daughter, or her children, will have as the wife of your third-born. <She is> a lady whom they could and may, if they wished, marry somewhere where she will be queen.]}⁹⁰

In the second half of August 1467, Galeazzo recalled Antonio da Trezzo to Milan, where he remained until March 1468. Returning to Naples, the envoy wrote to Bianca Visconti, describing Ferrante's horror at the way she is being treated by her son and insisting that she return to her dower town of Cremona where Galeazzo would not dare to harm her. However, if he should dare act against her, "la Maestà soa ex nunc ve ofere ogni aiuto et favore de gente et ogn'altra cosa a lui possibile per defensione vostra et de le cose vostre, non altramente ch'el facese per la salute sua propria" [from now on His Majesty offers you every assistance and favour, with men and everything else at his disposal for your defence and that of your possessions, no differently than he would for his own well-being].⁹¹ On 14 May 1468, Bianca replied that she should remain in Milan to welcome Galeazzo's bride, Bona of Savoy, sister of the queen of France, whose arrival was expected soon, while, with regard to Eleonora, she thanked Ferrante for "la bona dispositione soa in mandarla da nuy a Cremona, quando Sforza nostro figliolo

⁸⁹ Margaroli, 357.

⁹⁰ Margaroli, 358.

⁹¹ Margaroli, 363.

fosse là con nuy” [his willingness to send her to us in Cremona, when our son, Sforza, would be there with us].⁹²

The proxy marriage of Bona of Savoy and Galeazzo Sforza had taken place, “all’uso francese” [after the French custom], in Amboise on 10 May 1468, with Tristano Sforza representing his brother.⁹³ Within a week the party had travelled to the port of Aigues Mortes, near Marsellies, where they remained until 23 June, before boarding Galeazzo’s richly-outfitted ship, *Galeaza*, for the voyage to Genoa, during which their safety was ensured by eight Milanese galleys and two sent by Ferrante.⁹⁴

At the end of 1467, less than seven months after the birth of a son, Bianca’s daughter, Ippolita Maria, duchess of Calabria, travelled to Milan for her brother’s wedding. Lubkin writes that she, and the Neapolitan noblewomen who accompanied her, arrived in Genoa on Christmas Day 1467. She was joined in Milan by her husband and Federigo Montefeltro, who had been fighting in the Romagna against the Venetian *condottiere*, Bartolomeo Colleoni.⁹⁵ This was the duke of Calabria’s first visit to Milan and he apparently showed great interest in all aspects of the duchy’s administration and took part in all the entertainments arranged by Galeazzo to divert his guests.⁹⁶

While Ferrante was happy for Ippolita Maria to be with her mother, he was also concerned that his dispute with Galeazzo Maria would put her at risk. On 14 April 1468, Antonio da Trezzo had conveyed to Bianca Sforza Ferrante’s intention not to send Eleonora “in loco ch’ella havesse ad stare ad discretione sua, che è certo non la

⁹² Margaroli, 365.

⁹³ Margaroli, 345 and n. 107. The note includes a description of the French ceremony, described by Margaroli as “poco raffinata” [less refined], probably because it involved the bride and the proxy groom lying on a bed together, “in signo de vero matrimonio” [in a representation of a real marriage].

⁹⁴ Margaroli, 345. For a description of Bona of Savoy’s arrival and her meeting with Galeazzo; see Lubkin, 52–54.

⁹⁵ Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court*, 43.

⁹⁶ Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court*, 43–45.

tractaria meglio che'l se facia la Celsitudine Vostra, ma assai pegio" [to a place where she had to be at his (Galeazzo's) discretion, as he would certainly not treat her better than he has Your Excellency, but worse].⁹⁷

On 2 June 1468, Bianca Visconti wrote that she and Ippolita Maria had decided to accede to Galeazzo Maria's demand that they go to Milan for the wedding, but that she would not depart from there until Ippolita Maria was safely on her way back to Naples, and that she had promised the duke of Calabria not to leave his wife with Galeazzo Maria if she herself were not present.⁹⁸ She writes to Antonio da Trezzo on 2 June 1468 that she has resigned herself to never having Eleonora as her daughter-in-law, because:

a la prefata Maestà del Signore Re non pare de mandare qui la illustre domina Elionora nostra commune figliola per le rasoni et casone per essa alligate. Non dicemo altro al presente, perché la Maestà soa è prudentissima et non farà se non bene ad intendere al facto suo, quale reputiamo nostro. [His Majesty the king does not wish to send the Illustrious Lady Eleonora, our daughter in common, here, for the reasons and motivations he has expressed on her behalf. We are not saying anything else at the moment, because His Majesty is most prudent and will do nothing that does not do him honour, which we regard as our honour too.]⁹⁹

Again expressing her faith in Ferrante's counsel and her deep affection for him, she added with a note of resignation: "uno di maggiori desyderii che habiamo si è ch'el prefato Galeaz nostro figliolo facia verso la prefata domina Elionora quello che saria el debito et honore suo" [one of the our greatest wishes is that Galeazzo, our son, renders what is due and honourable to the Lady Eleonora]. She will also do all she can "per indure esso Galeaz a dare a Sforza tal cosa per la quale el possa vivere honorevelmente con la prefata domina Elionora et credemo pur el debia fare, perché monstra de amarlo [topersuade this Galeazzo to give to Sforza what he needs to live honourably with the

⁹⁷ Ferorelli, 428; Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court*, 63; Margaroli, 342.

⁹⁸ Margaroli, 368.

⁹⁹ Margaroli, 368–69.

Lady Eleonora, and we even believe that he must do it because he professes to love him].¹⁰⁰

Bona of Savoy reached Milan on 4 July 1468 and the wedding took place two days later, although an outbreak of plague cut short the planned festivities. Ippolita Maria wasted no time in setting off for Genoa, where Ferrante's galleys waited to convey her back to Naples. True to her promise to the duke of Calabria not to leave his wife alone with Galeazzo, Bianca Maria accompanied her daughter as far as Serravalle, before turning back towards Cremona. Becoming gravely ill at Melegnano, she died there on 23 October 1468.¹⁰¹

In his last letter to Bianca, dated 10 July 1468, to which he received no reply, da Trezzo wrote ominously of Eleonora's marriage to Sforza: "Ben dico, Madona mia, che me pare vedere assai refredarse questa pratica, che tuto intendo procede per la mala natura del Duca, la quale è tanto cognossuta qua, che me ne dole" [I can tell you, My lady, I seem to see this affair going very cold, which I know is because the duke's ill nature, which is so well-known here and which I regret].¹⁰²

Two letters which Antonio da Trezzo wrote to Galeazzo Sforza on 19 November 1468 and 22 July 1469, suggest that neither he nor Ferrante had been forgiven for their support of Bianca Visconti.¹⁰³ In the second of these letters, the ambassador reproached the duke for the way he had been treated by him, reminding him of his twenty-two years' faithful service to both him and his father and begging him not "darme affanno

¹⁰⁰ Margaroli, 369.

¹⁰¹ Stopping at Livorno, Ippolita Maria was greeted on behalf of the Florentine Republic by Lorenzo de' Medici; see Judith Bryce, "Between friends," 342 and n.9. There were some, including his old enemy, Bartolomeo Colleoni, who accused Galeazzo Maria of having his mother poisoned. The Milanese chronicler, Bernardino Corio, wrote, "si disse più de veneno che de naturale egritudine fussa morta" [it was said that it was more of poison than of natural malady that she died]; see Bernardino Corio, *Storia di Milano*, 2 vols., ed. A. Morisi Guerra (Turin: UTET, 1978), 2:1377.

¹⁰² Margaroli, 373.

¹⁰³ Margaroli, 374–77.

in questa mia senile età” [to make trouble for me in my old age], since he was already having bad dreams of “essere lì a Milano, dove me pare che la Signoria Vostra me faccia cercare per pigliarme et farme male” [being there in Milan, where it seems to me that Your lordship is having me hunted down in order to capture me and do me harm]. Still maintaining that he has done nothing to deserve such treatment, he appears to be genuinely frightened for his life: “le menaze vostre estimo grandemente et me dano tanto terrore, che non ne poria pensare più” [I take your threats very seriously and they terrify me so much that I can’t think about them any more].¹⁰⁴ Antonio da Trezzo increasingly distanced himself from Galeazzo after this letter and letters from Ferrante to Turco Cincinello, his envoy to Milan, suggest that Cincinello had taken over Antonio’s role.¹⁰⁵ By the close of 1471 the mutual antipathy between Galeazzo and Ferrante was reflected in their widely divergent foreign policies and a series of mutually-exclusive alliances.

While it has been generally accepted that Ferrante’s refusal to send Eleonora to Milan was a response to Galeazzo’s threatening and insulting attitude towards him personally, the possibility must also be considered that the king had become genuinely concerned for Eleonora’s own safety should she be exposed to the same erratic behaviour that the duke had demonstrated towards his own mother.¹⁰⁶ The fact that his own ambassador feared him suggested that Eleonora too could be at risk. Despite Ferrante’s reputation for political ruthlessness, and his “carattere chiuso e più o meno taciturno” [his closed and more or less taciturn nature],¹⁰⁷ evidence will be produced in this dissertation that Ferrante, both in person and in his letters to her, exhibited signs of

¹⁰⁴ Margaroli, 376–77.

¹⁰⁵ Ilardi, “Towards the *Tragedia d’Italia*,” 99 and n.19.

¹⁰⁶ Neither Ferorelli nor Margaroli entertains the possibility of an emotional element in Ferrante’s refusal to send Eleonora to Milan.

¹⁰⁷ Pontieri, 73.

affection towards Eleonora, as did her brothers.¹⁰⁸

The stalemate continued until early 1472, when Galeazzo Sforza finally agreed that a divorce should be negotiated, on the condition that another marriage alliance between Milan and Naples be considered. That was to be between his own infant son, Giangaleazzo, and Isabella d'Aragona, the eighteen-month-old daughter of Ippolita Maria Sforza and Alfonso, duke of Calabria.¹⁰⁹ Although the arrangements changed over time, it was originally stipulated that the bride should be sent to Milan at the end of a year, so that she could be “raised according to the customs we keep here.”¹¹⁰

On 23 February 1472, instructions were issued, entrusting the dual task of negotiating the divorce and the new marriage alliance to the Neapolitan ambassador in Milan, Turco Cincinello, and Francesco Maletta, who had been appointed Milanese ambassador in Naples after the recall of Giovanni Cagnola in November 1471.¹¹¹ The two ambassadors were instructed to petition Sixtus IV for a papal annulment of the earlier marriage and its replacement with that of Giangaleazzo Sforza and Isabella

¹⁰⁸ On the occasion of the proxy marriage in Naples, Niccolò Contrari wrote to Ercole d'Este “La Maiestà del Re fa una gran demonstratione de l'amor chel porta a questa sua fiolla duchessa de Ferrara” [His Majesty the King makes a great show of the love which he bears this daughter of his, the duchess of Ferrara]; see ASMo, Cancelleria ducale, Estero, Ambasciatori, agenti, corrispondenti estensi, Napoli, busta 1, letter from Niccolò Contrari to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 21 May 1473. Diomedes Carafa describes the reactions of her family to Eleonora's visit to Naples in 1477: “Lo Signor duca non saputo saciare honorar Madama et anco lo Signor Re da farla più dimostracione che la sua natura è solita” [The duke could not get enough of honouring Madama and even the king could not get enough of showing her more affection than is his normal nature]; see ASMo, Cancelleria estense, Estero, Carteggio di Principi e Signorie, Napoli–Sicilia, busta 4, autograph letter from Diomedes Carafa to Ercole d'Este, Naples, 3 June [1477].

¹⁰⁹ Ferorelli, 429.

¹¹⁰ Evelyn Welch, “Women as Patrons and Clients in the Courts of Quattrocento Italy,” in *Women in Italian Renaissance Culture and Society*, ed. Letizia Panizza (Oxford: European Humanities Research Centre, 2000), 21; Notar Giacomo records Isabella d'Aragona's birth: “Adi iiii de octobro 1470 nacque dal Ill. S. don Alfonso secundo de Calabria et dala ill. S. duchessa sua consorte una figlola che le fo posto nome Lisabella”; see Notar Giacomo, 121.

¹¹¹ Antonio da Trezzo had finally become a casualty of Ferrante's intervention on behalf of Bianca Visconti and was replaced by Giovanni Andrea Cagnola in April 1470. After that date, Antonio had remained in Ferrante's employ, never returning to Milan. Cagnola was recalled in November 1471 and made a member of the ducal *Consiglio di Giustizia*, although his name appears in correspondence to and from Naples up to and including 19 April 1472; see Ilardi, “Towards the *Tragedia d'Italia*,” 96, 99, 111, and 114, n. 81. Cagnola had been judged too weak to deal with Ferrante, while Maletta had a reputation for being “contentious and confrontational.”

d’Aragona. On 22 March 1472, Galeazzo Sforza wrote to the bishop of Novara, stressing that any dispensations should include the condition that Isabella d’Aragona should be sent to Milan within a year, a stipulation which proved to be a major sticking point in the negotiations.¹¹² On 8 May 1472, Galeazzo informed Ferrante that he would not assent to the divorce if the king did not agree to this condition. Diomedes Carafa relayed Ferrante’s hostile reaction to Galeazzo on 5 June 1472, suggesting: “se Vostra Eccellenza facesse pur cum effecto qualche cosa grata e piacevole a la Maestà del re, cioè il divortio de madonna Leonora, saria facile cosa havere poi el re ad vostri propositi” [if Your Excellency were merely to put into effect something welcome and pleasing to His Majesty the king, that is the divorce of the Lady Eleonora, it would then be easy to have the king <agree> to your plans], and that. “Vostra Celsitudine faria el meglio ad farsene de bona bocca et donare quello che non poteva vendere” [Your Excellency would do better to do it in good faith and to give what could not be sold].¹¹³ Threatening to take Bari away from Sforza Maria Sforza, if they did not receive the necessary consent, Ferrante was also able to demonstrate that Sixtus was disposed to release the dispensation, as Eleonora had stated before witnesses that she had only agreed to the marriage “per obedientia del padre” [to obey her father].

In an unedited document, discovered in the *Archivio di Stato* in Modena, the author, Giovanni Antonio Carafa, addresses to “Illustrissima et eccellentissima madama Dionora” his current thinking on the possibility that the pope will grant an annulment of her marriage to Sforza Maria Sforza. The argument is divided into four major points:

1. Se ’l papa de potentia absoluta senza niuna raione pote seperare lo matrimonio contracto per verba de presenti et che sia licito ale parte contrahere altro matrimonio

¹¹² Ferorelli, 429; Ilardi writes that there were rumours that Ferrante was offering Isabella in marriage to the seven-year-old duke Filiberto of Savoy; see Ilardi, “Towards the *Tragedia d’Italia*,” 114.

¹¹³ Ferorelli, 430–31.

2. Et si non lo pò fare senza causa porrallo fare con causa contra voluntate de alcune dele parte
3. Che cause raionebele pò indurere lo papa ad fare questa seperacione
4. Si per tempo passato per alcuno papa è stata facta simele seperacione et dispensacione.

[1. Whether the pope, by absolute authority without due cause, can dissolve the marriage contracted by present consent, and whether the parties may enter into another marriage? 2. And if he cannot do it without due cause, can he do it with due cause, against the will of either of the parties? 3. What reasonable causes the Pope may adduce to make this separation? 4. Whether in the past any pope has made a similar separation and dispensation?].¹¹⁴

It is significant that this document is in Italian rather than Latin, the language which would normally be used for cases of canon law, reinforcing the claim made earlier in this chapter that Eleonora did not know Latin.¹¹⁵ It also suggests that Eleonora was actively involved in the divorce proceedings, indeed that she was being coached by Carafa on what she should say to the ecclesiastical court, much as a modern barrister coaches a client today. Carafa finally came to the conclusion that:

Certa cosa è che la illustrissima Madama Dionora per pagura contrasse dicto matrimonio la quale multe lacreme gectàò protestando ipsa donna inclusa in uno castello, restrecta innanti ad illustri testimonii che in questo matrimonio consentea per forza. [It is certain that the Most Illustrious Madama Dionora contracted this marriage out of fear. She shed many tears, protesting while confined in a castle, constrained before many illustrious witnesses, that she consented to this marriage by force.]

This is the same conclusion alluded to by Giovanni Antonio's father, Diomede, in a letter to Galeazzo on 5 June 1472, when he claimed that : "il papa era disposto

¹¹⁴ ASMo, Casa e Stato, busta 324, document with a title assigned by a later archivist: "Sulla facultà del Papa di poter annullare il matrimonio contratto *per verba de presenti* da Madama Dionora figlia del Re di Napoli" [On the capacity of the Pope to annul the marriage contracted by present consent by Madama Dionora, daughter of the king of Naples] (sec. XV), signed on last page, "della Illustrissima Signoria piccolo servidore, Giovanni Antonio Carafa, *manu propria*" [from Her Most Illustrious Ladyship's humble servant, Giovanni Antonio Carafa, in my own hand].

¹¹⁵ See above, 68–69.

a rilasciare la necessaria dispensa, purchè Eleonora dichiarasse davanti ad alcuni testimoni di non aver mai desiderato tale matrimonio, al che quella annuiva per obediante del padre”[that the Pope was disposed to provide the necessary dispensation provided that Eleonora declared before several witnesses that she had never wanted this marriage, to which she had only agreed out of obedience to her father].¹¹⁶ From the evidence of both these documents it is clear that Eleonora took an active part in the process to annul her former marriage, her resolve doubtless strengthened by the arrival of Ercole d’Este’s envoy in Naples in March 1472, his mission to explore the possibility of a new marriage between her and his lord.

The Milanese ambassador, Francesco Maletta, continued to try to resolve the impasse between Ferrante and Galeazzo, and on 16 June 1472 he was able to report to Galeazzo that Ferrante had promised that Eleonora would not enter a new marriage “senza vostra saputa et consentimento et ad persona che serà ad commune proposito et beneficio” [without your knowledge and consent and (only) to someone who will be a mutual advantage and benefit], and that Isabella would be sent to Milan when she was seven, eight or ten years old, “come bramava la madre Ippolita” [as her mother Ippolita wished].¹¹⁷ Also on 16 June 1472, Galeazzo wrote to Ferrante, consenting to the dissolution of the marriage and expressing the wish that once again “viveremo insieme come debe fare il figliolo col padre” [we will live together as a son should with his father].¹¹⁸ A week later another conciliatory letter was sent from Pavia, accepting in essence Ferrante’s demands, but asking that Isabella be sent before the age of seven and that whomever Eleonora married, “non faccia per noi nè contra noi, salvo se non facessemo contra la predetta Maestà o contro quello tale che la se maritasse, non

¹¹⁶ Ferorelli, 430–33.

¹¹⁷ Ferorelli, 431.

¹¹⁸ Ferorelli, 431.

essendo provocati de lui” [not act for nor against us, provided that we do not act against the aforesaid Majesty or against him whom she were to marry without provocation].

Ferrante was asked to permit Sforza to keep the duchy of Bari, if only out of respect for his grandfather.¹¹⁹ The time was judged right to write to the archbishop of Novara “che disponesse Sua Santità a la separatione del matrimonio” [who could dispose His Holiness in favour of a dissolution of the marriage].¹²⁰ On 12 October 1472, the document by which Sforza renounced the right to marry Eleonora was dispatched to Rome and three days later, on 15 October 1472, a papal bull was issued in which Sixtus IV dissolved the marriage of Sforza Maria Sforza and Eleonora d’Aragona.¹²¹

Galeazzo’s insistence that the annulled marriage should immediately be substituted with one between his own infant son and his small niece underlines the current belief in the effectiveness of such marriages for forging political bonds between states. The preamble to the dotal agreement for the marriage of Anna Sforza and Alfonso d’Este in 1491 stated specifically that: “For deciding, confirming and increasing friendships, nothing is customarily judged more apt than the conjugal bond, which is accustomed above all and before all others with good reason to make the states and empires of princes stronger and more secure”.¹²² Despite this suggestion that aristocratic marriages were totally based on interests of state, in seeking the annulment of their marriage, both Eleonora and Sforza had openly canvassed their own particular interests. Eleonora had been actively involved in the legal argument for her release from the marriage, albeit acting on her father’s orders, while documents reveal that Sforza Maria argued strongly that he should be allowed to retain the title of duke of Bari,

¹¹⁹ Ferorelli, 432.

¹²⁰ Ferorelli, 432.

¹²¹ Ferorelli, 433.

¹²² Jane Fair Bestor, *Kinship and Marriage in the Politics of an Italian Ruling House: the Este of Ferrara in the Reign of Ercole I (1471–1505)*. PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago 1992, 177.

together with the rights and privileges which that title entailed.¹²³

While Eleonora had appeared to be enthusiastic about her marriage to Sforza Maria Sforza when it was first formalised in September 1465,¹²⁴ she would be equally enthusiastic when it was suggested that she should marry Ercole d'Este, and, unsurprisingly after this episode, she was impatient for the new arrangement to be finalised as quickly as possible. Sforza never married, dying childless in 1479, when Bari devolved to Ferrante. Immediately, his hugely ambitious brother, Ludovico Sforza, wrote to Ferrante with the request that the duchy and its rights and privileges be transferred to him, a request to which Ferrante agreed.¹²⁵

Although the Ferrarese exploratory mission led by Ugolotto Facino had arrived in Naples on 20 March 1472, more than six months before Sixtus IV granted the annulment releasing Eleonora from her first marriage, Ferrante had viewed Ercole's suit favourably. He and the recently-elected duke of Ferrara were well-known to each other from the fifteen years, from 1445 until 1460, which Ercole had spent at the Neapolitan court learning the arts of warfare. Ferrante was also reasonably close to his future son-in-law in age, being only eight years older than him. Eleonora, who was already twenty-two years old when her divorce was finalised, may also have had some contact with Ercole during his time in Naples, although she had been only ten when he had been obliged to return to Ferrara in 1460.

In Chapter 2 the marriage of Eleonora and Ercole will be studied from the perspective of its political expediency and the part it was expected to play in fulfilling

¹²³ Although Ferrante had originally opposed the idea that Sforza Maria Sforza should retain Bari, Francesco Maletta was able to change his mind, arguing “perché la iustitia no'l vole, per essere dato Bari ad esso duca et non a Madonna Elyonora, come dice il privilegio, et non solum per contemplatione de essere genero, ma per li meriti del padre” [because it is unjust, since Bari was given to the duke and not to Lady Eleonora, as the charter states, and not only out of regard for him as a son-in-law, but because of the merits of his father]; see Ferorelli, 432.

¹²⁴ See above, 74–75.

¹²⁵ Pepe, 17. On 19 June 1480, Ferrante, acting *in loco parentis*, announced the marriage of Eleonora's daughter, Beatrice, to Ludovico Sforza. After that date, she was referred to as the duchess of Bari.

the foreign policy objectives of both their states. Two collections of letters conserved in the *Archivio di Stato* in Modena will be used to illustrate the opposite sides of the negotiating process to decide the terms of the marriage contract: those from Ercole's representative in Naples, Ugolotto, clearly intended to inform and advise his lord of the progress he was making on his behalf, while, in his letters to Ercole, Diomedes Carafa was adversarial and aggressive, intent on ensuring the best possible conditions for Eleonora's life in Ferrara. The analysis of a small collection of letters which Ercole sent to Eleonora during the period of their betrothal will reveal that the couple were enthusiastic about their approaching marriage and that they were frustrated by the attempts to delay Eleonora's departure from Naples. The letters which Eleonora's brothers wrote to her before she left Naples will be studied to illustrate the affectionate relationship between the siblings and their sadness that she will be leaving them. Finally, the eye witness accounts of Ercole's courtiers in Naples of the wedding celebrations are significant not only because of their descriptions of the dowry negotiations, the proxy wedding and the associated entertainments, but also for the evidence they present both of Eleonora's warm nature and her father's affection for her. The courtiers' impressions of Eleonora's warmth and sweetness, not unlike those of the Sforza brothers in 1465, signalled to Ercole d'Este the good news that his bride was an exceptionally lovely young woman.