

HERCULEAN FERRARA

ERCOLE D'ESTE, 1471-1505, AND THE
INVENTION OF A DUCAL CAPITAL

THOMAS TUOHY

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THE D'ESTE OF FERRARA

'No wonder Tasso went mad in Ferrara, even in its best days' – thus Lady Eastlake expressed herself, inspired by the 'stern and strong' Castel Estense, in her journal of 1855.¹ This rather endearing burst of waspishness requires some qualification. Lady Eastlake was not at her best in Ferrara, being possessed by a not altogether rational fear that the river Po was about to flood the city. Her observation nevertheless encapsulates the preoccupations of many early-nineteenth-century visitors to Ferrara – the interest in literary associations, the consciousness of a great past, and the melancholia inspired by the dilapidated state of the city. Tasso's cell and Ariosto's tomb inspired Byron and Goethe and were visited by Shelley and Dickens, as well as by the more illustrious visitors, the Emperor Joseph II and the Czarevich Paul and his wife Maria Feodorovna. These visits were caused at least as much by the location of Ferrara, on the main route from Venice to Bologna, and well placed for the river traffic on the Po. The location that accounted for some of the historical importance of the city also meant that many visitors continued to pass through Ferrara even after the 'best days' were past. But Lady Eastlake's dismissive judgement also serves as a cautionary reminder that any comments made by later generations frequently provide more information about the writer and the attitudes of that later age than the subject under discussion.

Visitors to Ferrara frequently alluded to a period of former splendour, and none was more enthusiastic than William Hazlitt who wrote in 1824: 'Of all the places I have seen in Italy, it is the one by far I should most covet to live in. It is the ideal of an Italian city, once great, now a shadow of itself.'² This nostalgic and romantic pleasure, by which the shadow of splendour becomes the ideal, is very much a nineteenth-century view. Later in the century, prompted by the destructive forces of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, John Ruskin and William Morris championed the preservation of ancient monuments which newly made wealth threatened with rebuilding or over-zealous

¹ Eastlake, Elizabeth, *The Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, ed. Eastlake Smith, Charles, London, 1895, ii, p. 79. Entry for 18 October 1855.

² Hazlitt, William, *A Journey through France and Italy*, in *Collected Works*, ed. Waller, A.R. and Glover, A., London, 1903, ix, p. 265.

restoration. Our modern view of buildings enhanced by the patina of age owes much to them, but was not the accepted view in earlier centuries. In Italy the consequences of industrial wealth arrived almost a century later and many ancient monuments were preserved through poverty. Old buildings could normally be replaced only when there was money to pay for them. Thus the shell of quattrocento Ferrara survives, but this same poverty was responsible for lack of maintenance, and what would formerly have been a city of gaily painted buildings was reduced to a city of plain brick façades. Boswell in 1765 'viewed Ferrara as the beautiful remains of a great ruined city', and in 1846 Dickens wrote of 'the long silent streets, and the dismantled palaces where ivy waves in lieu of banners' as the best sights of all.³ Nostalgia was not an exclusively British response to Ferrara. Carducci and d'Annunzio were also sensitive to this decaying aspect of the place and in the first of his *Cities of Silence*, d'Annunzio provides us with the most poetic evocation of the city, describing the long wide streets like rivers leading us to eternity.⁴ Ferrara can still exercise its fascination upon the more romantically inclined, and the soft aqueous light of dawn or dusk on the roseate bricks can still evoke memories of past glories. But the few surviving relics of Ferrarese greatness can do little more than evoke a rather vague sense of the past, and by themselves provide no basis for serious historical study.

Ferrara has suffered many losses to its cultural heritage. In 1570 an earthquake which continued sporadically for several months, forcing the inhabitants to sleep in the open spaces for fear of further tremors during the night, destroyed a great number of buildings.⁵ The building of a fortress in the early seventeenth century necessitated the demolition of a large quarter of the city, and aerial bombardment in 1944 brought further destruction. Little now remains of the palaces and churches for which Ferrara was famous, nor of the country houses built for the Estense family. Only the overall plan of the city remains as it was conceived at the end of the fifteenth century, when Duke Ercole I d'Este enlarged the city by building defensive ramparts and laying out streets and an arcaded square within the enclosed area – a town planning that led Jacob Burckhardt to describe Ferrara as the first really modern city in Europe.⁶ Duke Alfonso II rebuilt the Castel Vecchio after the 1570 earthquake, and this still dominates the city centre (Fig. 6), but many palaces and churches were not rebuilt before the Estensi were driven out of Ferrara by Pope Clement VIII in 1598, after which date there was even less likelihood of damaged buildings being restored. Indeed the new papal government may have actively welcomed the disappearance of manifestations of former ducal authority. When John Evelyn was in Ferrara in 1645 he admired a bronze equestrian

³ Brady, F. and Pottle, F.A., *Boswell on the Grand Tour, 1765–1766*, Yale, 1955, p. 92. Dickens, Charles, *Pictures from Italy*, London, 1846, p. 284.

⁴ Carducci, Giosue, *Rime et Ritmi, alla città di Ferrara: Ode*, Bologna, 1899; d'Annunzio, Gabriele, *Laudi*, Milan, 1917, *Le Città del silenzio, Ferrara*, pp. 150–1.

⁵ Solerti, A., *Il Terremoto di Ferrara nel 1570*, Modena, 1889.

⁶ Burckhardt, Jacob, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Trans. S.G.C. Middlemore, London, 1929, i, *The State as a Work of Art*.

statue of Marquis Nicolò III d'Este, but surprisingly, less than fifty years after the d'Este had left Ferrara, the diarist provided only a garbled reference to their name, describing 'the figure of Nicholao Olao, once duke of Ferrara, on horseback, in copper'.⁷

In 1833 Donizetti composed three operas set in Ferrara, *Parisina*, *Lucrezia Borgia* and *Torquato Tasso*, real melodramas with scant regard for historical accuracy.⁸ During the nineteenth century, particularly after the unification of Italy, a great deal of research was undertaken in the Estense family archives, notably by Cittadella, Campori, Gandini, Venturi and Bertoni. But one of the consequences of the loss of so much visual material relating to Ferrara has been the failure to appreciate the significance of the family that ruled there. Had their buildings, paintings and sculptures, which we now know only from documents, actually survived and remained in Ferrara to the same extent as in Florence, then the Estensi would probably enjoy the same mythical aura that surrounds the Medici. It does seem distinctly possible however that the dukes of Ferrara were less concerned with using the arts to preserve their reputation for posterity than their mercantile rivals in Florence, and this will be discussed later.

The Estense family was one of the most distinguished in Italy, and ruled over various territories for 900 years.⁹ The family came from Este, south of the Euganean hills near Padua, and they were Lords of that town in the eleventh century. The family interest in Ferrara began in 1185 when Azzo d'Este married Marchesella degli Adelardi, heiress to the family that had been Lords of the city, but continuous rule was not achieved until Azzo Novello d'Este (1242–64) established control of the city with Venetian help in 1242. A Venetian representative, *Visdomino*, maintained a continuous presence in the city. Obizzo II d'Este (1264–93) was elected to the Lordships of Modena and Reggio, and together with the county of Rovigo, between the Po and the Adige, and Ferrara itself, these lands, which stretch across the width of Northern Italy, from the Adriatic into the Apennines, constituted the d'Este's territory for several centuries. The provinces of Modena and Reggio were imperial fiefs, and the province of Ferrara was a papal fief. The d'Este were made papal Vicars, subject to the payment of the *census vicariatus*, but Alberto d'Este (1388–93) obtained further privileges after a pilgrimage to Rome in 1391, commemorated by a statue and a lengthy inscription on the façade of the Cathedral of Ferrara. Alberto, with papal sanction, also founded the University of Ferrara, which was later to enhance the standing of the city by attracting students from other parts of Italy and Europe.

⁷ Evelyn, John, *The Diaries*, ed. Dobson. London, 1906, i, p. 285.

⁸ Weinstock, H., *Donizetti*, London, 1964, pp. 337–43.

⁹ For the d'Este family see Litta, *Famiglie Celebri Italiane*, ii, Milan, 1819; Chiappini, Luciano, *Gli Estensi*, Varese, 1967; Frizzi, A., *Memorie per la Storia di Ferrara*, 4 vols., Ferrara, 1848. For the evolution of the dynasty from its feudal origins, see Dean, Trevor, *Land and Power in late Medieval Ferrara, the Rule of the Este, 1350–1450*, Cambridge, 1988. For Alberto d'Este and his descendants see Gundersheimer, Werner L., *Ferrara, the Style of a Renaissance Despotism*, Princeton, 1973; Pardi, G., *Leonello d'Este, Marchese di Ferrara*, Bologna, 1904; Pardi, G., 'Borso d'Este, Duca di Ferrara, Modena e Reggio', *Studi Storici*, xv, 1906, pp. 3–58 and 133–203. The most complete and useful assessment of Borso and Ercole d'Este remains Gardner, Edmund G., *Dukes and Poets in Ferrara*, London, 1904. For the later Estensi see Southorn, Janet, *Power and Display in the Seventeenth Century. The Arts and their Patrons in Modena and Ferrara*, Cambridge, 1988.

Alberto was succeeded by his young son Nicolò III (1393–1441) who, after resisting attempts to usurp his power by his father in law, Francesco Novello da Carrara, Lord of Padua, maintained a long period of peace. The international importance of Ferrara was established during this period, and the choice of Ferrara as the site of the ecumenical council which brought together the representatives of the churches of Rome and Byzantium in 1438 was probably its most significant manifestation. Father of numerous children, Nicolò III merited the honorific *Pater Patriae* in a more piquant sense than normal, and is still remembered locally in the couplet:

Di quà e là del Po
Tutti figli di Nicolò.

Nicolò was succeeded by three of his sons: Leonello (1441–50) who, having been educated by Guarino de Verona, presided over an elegant and literary court; Borso (1450–71), who acquired the titles of duke of Modena and Reggio from the Emperor Frederick III in 1452, and duke of Ferrara from Pope Paul II in 1471 (Fig. 1); and Ercole (1471–1505), during whose reign the war with Venice (1482–84) resulted in the loss of Rovigo. His intrigues to regain that county were partly responsible for encouraging the Italian invasion of King Charles VIII of France in 1494.

Ercole I was succeeded by his son Alfonso I (1505–34) who continued his father's francophile policies against the aggression of Pope Julius II. Alfonso fought at the Battle of Ravenna with King Louis XII against the papal forces and arranged the marriage of his son, later Ercole II (1534–59) to Renée of France in 1528. Renée's calvinist sympathies created further tension between the increasingly powerful papacy and the Estensi, and after the death of Alfonso II (1559–97) without a legitimate heir, the troops of Pope Clement VIII occupied Ferrara, which without the court degenerated into a provincial backwater.

Alfonso's heir, Cesare d'Este, nevertheless retained his titles to the duchies of Modena and Reggio, and transferred the court to Modena in 1598. The d'Este continued to rule in Modena until the male line died out in 1803, after which date they continued as Habsburg Estense until the Unification of Italy. Marie Beatrice d'Este was queen of England as the wife of King James II, and the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, whose assassination at Sarajevo provided the occasion of the Great War in 1914, was a Habsburg Estense. But in Modena, as in Ferrara, the lustre of the d'Este family has been considerably dimmed. Bernini's bust and Velazquez's portrait of Duke Francesco I remained in Modena, but the best of the Estense pictures were sold to the Elector of Saxony, Augustus III, in 1746 and now hang in Dresden.¹⁰ The vast ducal palace in Modena is inaccessible because it is used as a military academy, so is the finest Estense villa at Sassuolo. The fact that Modena has been a bastion of Italian Communism has also had a baleful effect on the appreciation of the role of the d'Este family. When

¹⁰ Venturi, A., *La Regia Galleria Estense*, Modena, 1882 (reprinted 1989), and Bonsanti, Giorgio, *La Vendita di Dresda*, Modena, 1989.



Fig. 1 Borso d'Este, first duke of Ferrara, 1471. (Genealogia Estense, Bib. Est., Ms It. 720 Alpha L 5.16)

Cesare d'Este moved from Ferrara to Modena he took his library and archive with him. There therefore exists a dislocation between the archival material relating to Estense rule in Ferrara and the city itself. This did not discourage the researchers of the nineteenth century, but may be at least partly responsible for the decidedly sluggish use made of this material by local scholars within this century. This present study of the patronage of Ercole I d'Este is based largely on material from the Camera Ducale section of the Archivio Estense in Modena.

Ercole d'Este (Fig. 2) was born on 26 October 1431, the son of Marchese Nicolò III, then aged 48, and of his young bride whom he had married in January of that year, Rizzarda, daughter of Marchese Tomaso II di Saluzzo (1356–1416), from a small state near the source of the river Po, in Piedmont, near the French border. Not a great deal is known about Rizzarda. Litta does not provide her date of birth, but contents himself with the observation that 'she had no difficulty in marrying a man of mature years who had recently decapitated his wife and his natural son, accused of incestuous



Fig. 2 Ercole d'Este, Dosso Dossi (?) (Modena, Galleria Estense)

relations'.¹¹ She would have been half the age of her husband. The *Diario Ferrarese* describes her inaccurately as the daughter of Alovixe, late marquis of Saluzzo, probably a muddled reference to her brother Lodovico (1406–75), but the marriage was almost certainly arranged through her half brother Valeriano (1374–1443), who acted as regent for Lodovico. Rizzarda's father, Tomaso III, was the author of a chivalric romance, *Le Chevalier Errant*, which he wrote whilst imprisoned in France. A copy of this book in Paris is illustrated with the Nine Worthies, military heroes of the Old Testament, Classical Antiquity and Medieval Romance, together with Nine Heroines, and the same figures were painted in the Castle of La Manta, near Saluzzo, for Valeriano.¹² Rizzarda's marriage coincided with the granting by King Charles VII

¹¹ Litta, 1818–32, d'Este Tavola XII.

¹² Jorga, N., *Thomas III, Marquis de Saluces, étude historique et littéraire*, St Denis, 1983. The manuscript is Paris, BN, Ms Fr 12559, cited in Keen, Maurice, *Chivalry*, Yale, 1984. For the Nine Worthies, see Loomis, R.S., *Arthurian Legends in Medieval Art*, New York, 1939, pp. 27–40. See also Griseri, A., *Jaquero e il realismo gotico in Piemonte*, Turin, n.d., pp. 61–71.

of France of the use of the fleurs de lys in the d'Este coat of arms,¹³ and coming from an essentially French background she would not have felt too displaced within the predominantly francophile cultural atmosphere of the Ferrarese court. The names by which Nicolò d'Este baptised his children give an indication of this literary culture in the early fifteenth century, as most are derived from Arthurian romances, familiar at the court largely through French manuscripts. Meliaduse d'Este (1404–52) was named after either King Meliadus of Lyonesse, or his son, Sir Meliadus, 'il bel cavaliere'; Leonello (1407–50) and Borso (1413–71), born of the same mother, Stella dell'Assassino, were named after two brothers, the Arthurian knights Sir Lionel, foster child of the Lady of the Lake, and Sir Bors, who went in quest of the Holy Grail. Gurone Maria d'Este (d. 1484) was named after the hero of the Arthurian romance, Guiron le Courtois. Ginevra d'Este (1419–44) was named after King Arthur's queen, Guinevere, and Isotta d'Este (1425–56) was named after Yseult, or Isolde, lover of Sir Tristram. Rinaldo d'Este, on the other hand, was named after a paladin of the Carolingian cycle, Renaud. The choice of Hercules as a name for a child might seem to indicate an orientation towards classical antiquity, but as Maurice Keen has observed, the eagerness for knowledge of classical antiquity owed as much to vernacular French translations of classical texts as to Italian humanism, and in Jean de Courcy's *Chemin de Valence*, Hercules, Achilles and Jason were amongst the heroes added to the Nine Worthies.¹⁴

There was, however, also an increasing element of Italian humanism at the court of Nicolò III. Giovanni Aurispa came to Ferrara in 1427 as tutor to Meliaduse, Paolo Toscanella in 1431 as tutor to Borso, and most significantly Guarino Guarini came in 1429 as tutor to Leonello.¹⁵ As Joanna Woods-Marsden has suggested, our perceptions of chivalric romance have been clouded by the disdain of humanists, who have continued to provide the most vocal testimony to the literary culture of their age.¹⁶ Pier Candido Decembrio's references to romance as 'incredible French lies' is a reasonable assessment of their content as history, but it is surely significant that when Angelo Candido Decembrio describes Leonello's disdainful view of vernacular literature as 'those books which sometimes on winter nights we explain to our wives and children' he does at least imply sufficient familiarity with the material to make such condescending explanations possible.¹⁷ In the inventory of the library of Nicolò III, compiled in 1436, out of a total of 279 books, 57 were in French, including 19 romances; in the library of

¹³ Spaggiari, A. and Trenti, G., *Gli stemmi estensi e austro estensi, profilo storico*, Modena, 1985.

¹⁴ Gardner, Edmund G., *The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature*, London, 1930, provides a good introduction to the subject and a list of characters of romances, together with their equivalent names in Italian. See also Bertoni, G., *La Biblioteca Estense e la cultura ferrarese ai tempi del Duca Ercole I, 1471–1505*, Turin, 1903, pp. 69–93, and Woods-Marsden, Joanna, *The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescoes*, Princeton, 1988, pp. 20–6. Keen, 1984, p. 111, and Piaget, A., in *Romania*, 27, 1898, pp. 582–607, for Jean de Courcy and the *Chemin de Valence* (BL Royal, 14, E, II).

¹⁵ Gardner, 1904, pp. 26–66, and for the reference to P. C. Decembrio, p. 85. For a good general introduction to humanism, see Holmes, George, *The Florentine Enlightenment, 1400–1450*, Oxford, 1969.

¹⁶ Woods-Marsden, 1988.

¹⁷ Gardner, 1904, pp. 46–53, also Baxandall, Michael, 'A Dialogue on Art from the Court of Leonello d'Este: Angelo Decembrio's "De Politia Litteraria, Pars LXVIII"', *JWCI*, xxvi, 1963, pp. 304–26.

Ercole d'Este, compiled in 1495, out of a total of 512 books there were at least 48 in French, including sometimes as many as three copies of books dealing with King Meliadus, Merlin, King Arthur, Godfrey de Bouillon, Charlemagne, Guiron and Tristan.¹⁸ By 1495 Ercole may well have ceased to read such literature himself, but it seems reasonable to assume that as a child he would have become familiar with it, and with the knightly virtues it extolled. That French chivalric literature, or possibly the contemporary Italian literature that it inspired, was still in vogue for the succeeding generation within this period is borne out by the correspondence of 1491 between Isabella d'Este and Gian Galeazzo Sforza in which the relative merits of Orlando and Rainaldo (Roland and Renaud) were disputed.¹⁹

At the tender age of two Ercole was knighted by the Emperor Sigismund, and his new-born brother Sigismondo was named after the emperor.²⁰ In 1438, when Ercole was seven, Ferrara was the setting for the great ecumenical council, convoked with the intention of uniting the Catholic church of Rome and the Orthodox church of Byzantium in defence against the threat of Muslim Turkey. The council was later to move to Florence, because of an outbreak of the plague, but for nearly a year Ferrara was the residence of Pope Eugenius IV and his cardinals, of the Patriarch of Constantinople, and of the Byzantine Emperor John Paleologus; the lavish costumes and ceremonials that young Ercole would have witnessed may well have made a lasting impression.²¹ Certainly in later years a taste for play acting and display was to manifest itself in Ercole's direct involvement in organising court festivals and in the revival of classical theatre.

Although Ercole was a legitimate son, he was not perceived at birth as the heir to the d'Este patrimony. His father had already secured the legitimacy of Leonello by papal sanction in 1429, when Leonello at the age of 21 was designated heir.²² As Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini noted, legitimacy was not respected very rigorously in the Estense succession,²³ but Ercole's mother would appear to have had higher hopes for her son, which may well have been communicated to him as a small boy. When Nicolò died in 1441 Ercole was ten years old, and when he was twelve his mother left Ferrara and returned to Saluzzo, taking with her a great deal of money, jewels and clothes, amounting to 60,000 ducats.²⁴ Even if her eldest son were not to succeed to his legitimate title, there was no reason why the mother should not keep her share of the

¹⁸ Cappelli, A., 'La Biblioteca Estense nella prima metà del secolo XV', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, xiv, 1889, pp. 12-13. Bertoni, 1903, pp. 235-52.

¹⁹ Luzio, A. and Renier, R., 'Delle relazioni di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga con Lodovico e Beatrice Sforza', *ASL*, II, vii, 1890a, pp. 103ff.

²⁰ Anon, *Diario ferrarese dall' anno 1409 sino al 1502 di autori incerti*, RIS, 24, vii, 1, ed. G. Pardi, Bologna, 1928. (DF), 1433 Sept 8, p. 20.5: 'il dicto Imperadore fece cinque figlioli dello ill. marchese Nicolò cavalieri; cioè Mr Lionelo, Mr Borso, Mr Hercole, Mr Folcho, Mr Sigismondo. Et questo lui lo tenete a baptesimo.'

²¹ Gill, J., *The Council of Florence*, Cambridge, 1959, and Hofmann, G., 'Die Konzilsarbeit in Ferrara', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, iii, 1937, pp. 110-40, 403-55.

²² Pardi, 1904, p. 45.

²³ Gardner, 1904, pp. 29-30.

²⁴ DF, 1443 Oct. 24, p. 27. 17: 'se partite Madona Rizarda, molgiere che fu del Marchese Nicolò, et andete a Saluzo per stare, et portò con lei, tra roba, veste, dinari et zoje, che furno estimate ducati sexanta milia.'

patrimony; such an accord would probably have been written into the marriage agreement. But Rizzarda was to have her triumph, returning to Ferrara as the mother of the new duke in 1472. She had the pleasure of greeting Ercole's bride at the top of the stairs of the ducal palace in 1473, before she died at Belfiore in 1474. She was buried near her husband in the nearby church of S. Maria degli Angeli.²⁵ In 1444 Ercole would have witnessed the wedding festivities of Leonello and Maria d'Aragona, celebrated in great style with a hunt of wild animals, jousts with an oak forest constructed in the Piazza, and a display of St George slaying the dragon.²⁶ Maria was the illegitimate daughter of Alfonso of Aragon who had taken possession of the Kingdom of Naples in 1442. Alfonso wished to cultivate Ferrara as an ally against the naval power of Venice, and Borso d'Este was invited to Naples in 1444 to advise the king on the administration of his newly acquired kingdom. Borso's sound advice has been preserved together with an interesting description of Naples, and it may well have been on Borso's initiative that Ercole and his brother Sigismondo were sent to be educated at the court of Naples, as companions to the heir to the throne, Ferrando.²⁷ Ercole would have been fourteen when he went to Naples, and he stayed at the Aragonese court until he was nearly thirty. It seems reasonable therefore to look to Naples for indications of Ercole's development in adolescence and early maturity, and to King Alfonso for the formative influences on the future duke of Ferrara: the parallels are conspicuous.

Alfonso, although he would wear rich brocades when ceremony required, preferred to wear simpler black clothes. Vespasiano da Bisticci describes the rough treatment given to an overdressed Sieneese ambassador, whose costume was spoiled by deliberate jostling in a small room, and another Sieneese ambassador whose dress and equipage became the subject of ridicule, and whose finery was reduced to sodden rags in the course of a hunting expedition.²⁸ Ercole may not have been present on either occasion, but would probably have been familiar with such anecdotes. When Ercole returned to Ferrara the sobriety of his dark clothes was remarked upon in contrast with the dress of Borso d'Este who always wore cloth of gold and jewels, even when hunting.²⁹ The

²⁵ DF, 1472 June 9, p. 80.8. Caleffini, Ugo, *Cronica di Ferrara, 1471-1494*, Vat., Chigi, li.4, 1473 July 3. DF, 1474 May 25, p. 90.20. Caleffini, 1474 Aug. 17; 'per mezzo lo altare grande in l'archa da le done fora de la Capella grande honorevolmente fu sepelita.'

²⁶ Pardi, 1904a, p. 59, based upon a letter from Aurispa to Panormita, DF, 1444, p. 27.23.

²⁷ Ryder, Alan, *The Kingdom of Naples under Alfonso the Magnanimous. The Making of a Modern State*, Oxford, 1976. Foucard, C., 'Proposta fatta della Corte Estense ad Alfonso I Re di Napoli', *Archivio storico per le provincie napoletane*, iv, 1879, pp. 689-752, and Foucard, C., 'Descrizione della Città di Napoli e statistica del Regno nel 1444', *Archivio storico per le provincie napoletane*, ii, 1877, pp. 725-57.

²⁸ Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vite di Uomini illustri del Secolo XV*, eds. Waters, G.W. and E., as *The Vespasiano Memoirs*, London, 1926, pp. 59-83.

²⁹ Genealogia Estense, Bib. Est. It. 720 Alpha L.5.16. 'vestia sempre d'oro', and DF, 1471, p. 73.5: 'sempre in campagna cavalcava vestito di panno d'oro e di seda; per la terra portava collane di septanta milia ducati l'una.' For Ercole's clothes see Sabadino degli Arienti, G., *De Triumphis Religionis*, Vat. Rossiano, 176, ed. Gundersheimer, W., 1972. (Sabadino), p. 50, Caleffini, 1475 May, and Tuohy, Thomas, 'Studies in Domestic Expenditure at the Court of Ferrara, 1451-1505, Artistic Patronage and Princely Magnificence', Ph.D. diss., Warburg Institute, University of London, 1982a, pp. 80-90 for clothing at the court.

piety that was to become such a prominent feature of Ercole's later life and to govern much of his architectural patronage probably derived from his early experiences in Naples. The reenactment of the Last Supper on Maundy Thursday, with the washing of the feet of poor men, who were then waited on at table, was practised by King Alfonso, and subsequently adopted by the duke of Ferrara.³⁰ The Passion plays staged in S. Chiara and the Cathedral may also have fuelled Ercole's taste for the drama, and his enthusiasm for music would have been given early encouragement by the choir of the court chapel in the Castel Novo, which by 1451 was second in Europe only to that of King Henry VI of England.³¹ Alfonso and Ercole seem to have shared certain traits of character in their boredom with administrative duties and their means of avoiding them; Vespasiano described the difficulty encountered by an emissary from Barcelona in trying to see the king in 1457, and Ercole was later to be equally elusive, once neglecting all duties in order to play chess with a Jew, another time when preoccupied with his court painter. Alfonso and Ercole both shared a sense of reserve and secretiveness.³² Equicola describes Ercole in Naples as having been friendly with everyone, but familiar with very few.³³ Neither ruler was dominated by favourites.

At Naples, as the companions of King Alfonso's son and heir, Ferrando, whose tutor was Bartolomeo Facio, Ercole and his younger brother would have had the opportunity to benefit from a humanist education; the court of Naples, even more than the court of Leonello d'Este in Ferrara, attracted many distinguished scholars. Lorenzo Valla was secretary to the king from 1435 until 1446, and amongst other books produced a biography of the king's father, *De rebus a Ferdinando gestis*. The famous rivalry with Panormita, who dedicated his *Dicta ac facta Alfonsi regis* to the king, was partly enacted in Naples, and it was here that Bartolomeo Facio wrote his *De viribus illustribus* and his *De rebus gestis regis Alphonsi*. Aurispa was in Naples during the early years of Alfonso's reign, and other humanists included Pier Candido Decembrio from 1443, and Angelo Candido Decembrio who left Ferrara after the death of Leonello d'Este. Teodoro Gaza was in Naples in 1456 and describes how the king liked to have a book read to him in his library together with a few intimates after supper, and this 'Ora del Libro' is further described by Pontano in his *De Principi*.³⁴

Unfortunately, no inventory of King Alfonso's library survives, other than one

³⁰ Ryder, Alan, *Alfonso the Magnanimous, King of Aragon, Naples and Sicily, 1396–1458*, Oxford, 1990, ch. 8, pp. 306–58.

³¹ Atlas, A., *Music at the Aragonese Court of Naples*, Cambridge, 1985, and for Ercole's later enthusiasm see Lockwood, Lewis, *Music in Renaissance Ferrara, 1400–1505*, Oxford, 1984.

³² Vespasiano, p. 75, Ryder, 1990, ch. 9. For Ercole see Zambotti, Bernardino, *Diario ferrarese dall'anno 1476 sino al 1504*, RIS, 24, vii, 2, ed. Pardi, G., Bologna, 1934, 1478 March 15, cited in Gundersheimer, 1973, p. 199, and Gundersheimer, W.L., 'The Patronage of Ercole d'Este', *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, iv, 1976, pp. 1–18.

³³ Equicola, Mario, *Genealogia degli Signori Estensi*, Bib. Ariostea, Ms Cl. II, 349, cited in Bertoni, 1903, p. 12, n.2, Naples 'ivi tradusse il fiore della pueritia et gioventù in gloriosi exercitii: a tutti amico e benivolo, cum pochi hebbe strictissimo vinculo di famigliarita'.

³⁴ de Marinis, T., *La Biblioteca napoletana dei Re d'Aragona*, Milan, 1948, (p. 3 for Pontano's *De Principi*, i, 89), and Ryder, 1990, pp. 307–31.