

Enikő Békés

Galeotto Marzio and the Court of King Matthias Corvinus

De egregie, sapienter, iocose dictis ac factis regis Mathiae

Galeotto Marzio arrived for the first time in Hungary in 1461, probably at the invitation of his friend Janus Pannonius, who was his fellow student in Ferrara at the school of the humanist Guarino Veronese. He returned to Matthias' court several times until 1486, and became the court humanist of the king. Research on the Hungarian Renaissance has focused on his book entitled *De egregie, sapienter, iocose dictis ac factis regis Mathiae* (*Excellent, Wise, Facetious Sayings and Deeds of King Matthias*, henceforth *De Dictis*) which he completed and dedicated to Johannes Corvinus in 1485.

Since its first printed edition of 1563 this work has always been regarded as an important historical source related to Matthias' period, nevertheless the ideas of Galeotto were not always appreciated by the scholarship. His biographer for example, Jenő Ábel described the work as follows: "Galeotto's base flattery and self-conceit stand out also in this text, however we have to thank him for having transmitted to us so many characteristic traits from the life of king Matthias." (Ábel, 1880: 290–291. English translation by the author. See also Bruckner, 1901.) These kind of opinions esteemed the author's cultural-historical references to the everyday life of the court and presumed that the text – likewise the contemporary portraits – reveals the authentic image of the ruler. On the other hand these studies couldn't reconcile Galeotto's heretical views and rambling style with their idealised notion about Matthias. The Italian research related to Galeotto, emerging in the 1950s, began to focus on the relation of his works to the history of philosophy instead of the traditional approach of literary history (See, among others: Marzio, 1948; Marzio, 1949, Vasoli, 1977.). This influenced the refinement of the Hungarian judgement promoted by the spirit of that age to a great extent as well, since he was considered to be almost a predecessor of the Enlightenment and materialism because of his thoughts, similar to Averroism, and quite rational scientific concepts (Marzio, 1977: 111–115. Similar treatment is reflected by: Briggs, 1974: 75–84.). In the

recent decades several studies dealt with the philosophical aspects or with the literary genre of the *De dictis*, by this time free of the positivist prejudices.¹

The aim of this paper is to present one aspect of the work, which hitherto has not been studied, namely the analysis of the text in comparison with the *facetiae*-literature, and the examination of the role of the *rex facetus*, or *vir facetus* in the elaboration of the ruler's image.

Galeotto's *De Dictis* owes its popularity in past and present particularly to the fact that it differs in its genre from the other laudatory texts composed for the Hungarian king. This difference is not due to the author's originality, since he also applied above all *topoi*, yet his anecdotes, dialogues illustrating the court life and the king's habits in a realistic manner create the impression of authenticity in the reader. As Klára Pajorin has pointed out, the content must be true to a certain extent, since Galeotto was the only one among the humanists praising the king, who actually lived in the court, while many others did not even meet him personally (Pajorin, 1990: 344–346.). As it is well-known, the prototype of the work is the *Facta et dicta memorabilia* of Valerius Maximus and the *apophtegma*-collections containing famous men's wise and witty sayings. Humour plays an important role in Galeotto's text; therefore it includes typical elements of the *facetiae* literature as well. The witty content is emphasised right by the title: while the main Renaissance model of his work, written by Antonio Beccadelli about Alfonso of Aragon, king of Naples, is entitled only *De dictis ac factis Alphonsi regis*, Galeotto completed his title by the adverbs *egregie*, *sapienter*, and last but not least *iocose*. Beside the *exempla* and facetious literature, the third element that determines the characteristic genre of Galeotto's work is the genre of the "speculum of princes", due to the fact that the manuscript was dedicated to Johannes Corvinus destined to be the heir to the throne, in order to stimulate him for virtuous life („...quod te ad virtutem excitaret...") (Marzio, 1934: 1. [*Dedicatio*]) through the example of his father, as it is expressed in the dedication.² For this reason Galeotto inserted in the praise of the king's sayings and deeds the traditional catalogue of royal virtues, which, among others, constitutes the framework also of the *speculum* composed by Andreas Pannonius for king Matthias (*Libellus de virtutibus Mathiae Corvino dedicatus*, 1467.).

Galeotto himself reveals what other classical prototypes he followed in outlining the image of the jesting king: at the end of the preface he underlines that even the greatest philosophers and rulers in history, such as emperor Augustus, jested very

¹ I refer here to the studies of Klára Pajorin, 1990; Tibor Klaniczay, 1982; Tibor Kardos (in: Marzio, 1977: 111–115.) and Péter Kulcsár, 1983. In my opinion, however, Kulcsár states wrongly that the work of Galeotto reflects mainly the ideas of Neoplatonism. See also: Miggiano, 1993: 72–89.

² To this genre refers Galeotto in the last chapter as well, addressing again Johannes Corvinus: "Sint ergo haec tibi imitationis speculum, ut his exemplis firmatus magnarum rerum idoneus gubernator habearis." in: Marzio, 1934: 36. (cap. 32.)

often, then he recommends Macrobius and the *Apophthegmata* by Plutarch as references on the subject. (Marzio, 1934: 2. [*Dedicatio*]) The same is emphasised by Zsigmond (Sigismund) Torda, who published the first edition of the work. His dedication to Maximilian II. reads as follows: “Neque vero ex seriis tantum, verum etiam ex iocis, facetiisque magnorum hominum temperationes, habitudinesque internae perspicuntur.” (Marzio, 1611: 10. For more on the history of the *editio princeps* see: Ritoókné Szalay, 2002: 210.)

Plutarch’s *Apophthegmata* has been related earlier to Galeotto’s *De Dictis*, as it was translated in latin by Janus Pannonius to king Matthias in 1467 under the title *De dictis regum et imperatorum* (edited in: Ábel, 1880: 30.). Yet the other source, cited by Galeotto, also needs to be examined in this respect.³ In Macrobius’ *Saturnalia* Symmachus suggests to the company that recalling famous men’s jests would be proper to the spirit of the feast: „Haec nobis sit litterata laetitia et docta cavillatio” (Macrobius, 1994: vol. I., 134. [Lib. II., cap. 1., 9.]) he says, underlying the noble character of the genre, that legitimizes also Galeotto’s choice of subject. Then Symmachus refers to the facetious Cicero and Cato. The allusion to Cicero is particularly important in this context as in his *De oratore* he defines the *facetiae* as a rhetorical term, that was later further elaborated by Quintilianus (Cicero, *De oratore*, II. 218–289.; Quintilianus, *Inst. orat.*, VI. 3., see also: Gondos, 1996: 198.). Galeotto also refers to the jesting emperor Augustus, to whom Macrobius dedicated an entire chapter.⁴ It has to be noted here that Petrarch also adopted this passage on Augustus in his *Rerum memorandarum libri*, in the chapter entitled *De dicacitate sive facetiis*, that later became one of the models of Renaissance facetious literature.⁵ Macrobius provides explanation also for the locution “iocose dicta”, that is – as he says – a term to be applied for jesting, shortly and sharply phrased wise sayings.⁶ Galeotto’s *De dictis* can be paralleled with the *Saturnalia* also because neither of them is a *symposion* of exclusively moral-philosophical content, the conversationalists also discuss astronomy, medicine or questions concerning nourishment. These subjects occur frequently in Galeotto’s other works accumulating encyclopaedic knowledge, and also in his *De dictis*.

Galeotto attributes several such jests to Matthias. For instance at one place the king explains that the child of an adulteress takes after her husband just because the

³ The comparison between Macrobius and Galeotto is important also because even János Horváth claimed that Galeotto had drawn nothing from Macrobius, cf. Horváth, 1935: 140.

⁴ Lib. II., cap. 4.

⁵ Petrarca, 1554: 468–469. (Lib. II., cap. III.) One of Galeotto’s primary Renaissance model, the anecdotal biography written by Antonio Beccadelli about Alfonso of Aragon is also based on the portrayal of Augustus in Suetonius and in Macrobius, see: Bowen, 1986: 6–7.

⁶ „Itaque nostri, cum omnia quae dixissemus dicta essent, quae facete et breviter et acuti locuti essemus, ea proprio nomine appellari dicta voluerunt.” in Macrobius, 1994: vol. I., 135. (Lib. II., cap. 1, 14.)

woman thinks of her man while committing adultery.⁷ In another case Matthias comments that the Italian court-ladies take their seats sooner than Queen Beatrix not because they are impolite but because they are aware of their ugliness and therefore they prefer to be as small as possible in order to be unnoticeable for men (Marzio, 1934: 4. [cap. 3.]). Another witty saying of the king was that there are three undesirable things in life, these are: the warmed up dip, the conciliated friend and the bearded wife (Marzio, 1934: 17. [cap. 16., English translation by the author]). As Tibor Kardos (Marzio, 1977: 125.) suggested the following episode can be considered as a deliberate *truffa*: on the feast of Epiphany the king – contrary to the habit – assigned seats to certain noblemen among the priests, arguing that those noblemen were unmarried, so they befit better the company of the priests than that of the married men. The king commented as follows: “thus you, unmarried Sirs are directed in the group of unmarried men, and so we exclude you from our company for being alien and different from us. ... Hearing this everybody burst out laughing...” (Marzio, 1934: 30. [cap. 29., English translation by the author]) We have to mention here that Matthias takes a stand against virginity in another chapter as well when he is debating with the Dominican Giovanni Gatti. The king explains his view why not the virgin and innocent John the Apostle became the head of the church, but Peter, who was “coitus violentiam expertus” (Marzio, 1934: 33. [cap. 30.]). During the debate Matthias reads out some lines from Saint Jerome’s *Adversus Jovinianum*. As it is well known, Saint Jerome esteems virginity higher than marriage in this work, however Matthias seems to agree with Jovinianus in this issue, who considered marriage and virginity of equal value.⁸ All this casts light on Galeotto’s Epicurean and anticlerical way of thinking also condemned of heresy. It is no accident that he puts these words into Matthias’ mouth. For instance in his *De doctrina promiscua* Galeotto devotes an entire chapter to the subject of *coitus* where he argues beside its positive effects, verified by medical science.⁹ Nevertheless, as it is presumed on the base of Bonfini’s *Symposion*, the views of Matthias might have been similar to that of Galeotto, as Bonfini puts right those words of Jovinianus in the mouth of the king that defend marriage opposed to virginity – as it was analysed by Klára Pajorin (Pajorin, 1982: 524–526; Pajorin, 1994: 200ff.).

Returning to the subject matter of the *facetiae* we have to mention that the medieval kings were also familiar with the image of the *rex facetus*. In his essay entitled *Laughter in the Middle Ages* Jacques Le Goff relates the topos of the “jesting king” quite surprisingly to the image of Saint Louis, then he continues with Henry II whose wittiness is attested by a number of sources (Le Goff, 1997: 44. For more on

⁷ Marzio, 1934: 3. (cap. 2., English translation by the author). The story can be paralleled with one chapter of Proggio Bracciolini’s *Facetiae*, entitled “How a child has gained his nose?”

⁸ On Saint Jerome’s afterlife in the Renaissance see: Rice, 1985, especially chapter 4: “Divus litterarum princeps.”

⁹ cap. 19.

the role of *facetia* in medieval royal courts see: Jaeger, 1985: 162–171.). As it will be shown later on, humour, being a constitutive element of the communication at court, subsequently played an important role also in the *institutio* literature of the courtiers.

Besides the classical and medieval prototypes several Renaissance works served as a model for Matthias, or more precisely for Galeotto. The most popular contemporary representant of the genre was the anecdotal character portrayal on the deeds of king Alfonso of Aragon by Beccadelli. This work must have been Galeotto's primary model, as it is testified right by the similarity of the titles, as mentioned above. Nevertheless it's not just the genre that links these two works: king Alfonso of Aragon, Il Magnanimo, was a protagonist of the humanist panegyric literature, at the same time the grandfather of Beatrix (For a presentation of the works written about king Alfonso of Aragon see: Graciotti, 1975: 56–60.). In this way his image of the wise king and patron of literature, formulated in the works written about him, must have been a model also for Matthias' self-representation. Another characteristic feature of the ideal king, portrayed by Beccadelli, is that he is fond of jokes and he himself jests frequently ("cum esset admodum facetus et urbanus...") (Panormita, IV. 27.). For instance he claims that the secret to a good marriage is a blind wife and a deaf husband. Another time when he is asked why people suffering in podagra talk so much he answers that because they move their tongues instead of their legs (Panormita, 1538: 80. On Beccadelli's work and other Renaissance collections of *facetiae* see: Bowen, 1986.). As Sante Graciotti stated, although the Florentine republican humanists played a crucial role in shaping the image of king Matthias, we have to bear in mind how important model the monarchical Naples for the Buda court was (Graciotti, 1975: 60–63.).

According to tradition Beatrix did not like Galeotto very much, therefore it is conceivable, that he did not worm his way into the Queen's heart with the dedication to Johannes Corvinus either. Nevertheless Galeotto could not ignore the presence and the important role of the Neapolitans at the Buda court, so he compensates by praising the Queen's beauty and erudition in the work, and describes Beatrix and her brother, Francesco explicitly as the embodiment of their grandfather's *arma et litterae* ideal (Marzio, 1934: 23–24. [cap. 25.]). In chapter 25, in the story of the intendant, Alfonso features himself, whose *magnificentia* and *liberalitas* is esteemed by Matthias, but the lesson of the episode in Galeotto's narration is that the Hungarian king surpassed even him in this respect (Marzio, 1934: p. 24. [cap. 25.]).

But the image of *rex facetus* appears in other Renaissance texts as well: Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who also wrote a commentary to Beccadelli's work, in his *De viris illustribus* describes Emperor Sigismund with the term *sermone facetus* (Piccolomini, 1842, 65.). Bonfini, historiographer of the king, also incorporated this characteristic

in his description about Matthias.¹⁰ All this illustrates that Galeotto makes Matthias appear in a traditional role that originates in the Antiquity (For more on the relationship between humour and the ideal ruler see: Bowen, 1984.). It has to be noted here that Galeotto's master, Guarino also backed the genre of the anecdotal biography when he remarked in one of his letters that the aim of historiography with the *exempla* is not merely teaching, but also entertaining.¹¹

Facetudo was actually not an exclusive virtue of the rulers. In the *institutio* literature of the courtiers, emerging in the 16th century, wittiness becomes one of the most important social virtues, no longer as merely a rhetorical term, but also as an ethical notion that is connected to the Aristotelian concept of *urbanitas*.¹² I think that the origin and initiative of this scale of values is also to be found in Galeotto's *De dictis*. The elaboration of the *vir facetus* notion leads us back again into Naples where Giovanni Pontano wrote his *De sermone*, the first essential explication of the ethical definition of the *facetudo* (Pontano, 1954. For a detailed analysis of this aspect see: Luck, 1958.). Although Pontano's work dates from 1499, that is a few years later than Galeotto's *De dictis*, the two works reveal many similarities in treating *facetudo* as a value.¹³ As it is well known, Pontano was Beccadelli's friend and a scholar from the entourage of king Alfonso of Aragon, who recorded his personal experiences concerning the king and members of the Neapolitan academy in his *De sermone*, describing all of them as *homines urbani atque faceti*. But all the typical personages of court life, such as the flattering or intriguing or right the opposite, the forerunners of the *gentiluomo*¹⁴ feature in Galeotto's stories as well, in which he himself also appears frequently.

¹⁰ „Illum sales, ioci et amicorum consuetudo nimis oblectavit, hunc vita recondita, severa, tristis et a suorum consuetudine admodum aliena.” (Bonfini, *Rerum ungaricarum decades*, IV. IV. 109.); „Rex denique...letus, hilaris et iucundus ac ad omnia promptus...” (Bonfini, *Ibidem*, IV. IV. 110.)

¹¹ Written in 1446 for Tobia del Borgo, quotes: Marchiori, 1971: 97. For more on the possible role of facetious topics in the instruction of Guarino's school see: Jankovits, 2002: 71–82.

¹² Aristotle on wittiness, as virtue: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1128a, 1128b. For more on this see: Vigh, 2005, 133–160, Ferroni, 1980, Pignatti, 1998.

¹³ Pontano: „Facetudinem virtutem esse”; „...sitque ita facetus, ut severitatis quoque meminerit, adeo autem severus, ut sciat laborum comitem esse debere quietem ac ludum aliquem, honestum ac commendatione dignum.” (in Pontano, 1954: Lib. III., cap. II.; Lib. VI., cap. I.) Galeotto: „Severam enim iocunditatem vel iocundam severitatem sapientiamque iocis conditam vel iocos sapientia commixtos nemo unquam etiam barbarus abhorruit.” (in Marzio, 1934: 36. cap. 32.) In these quotations both authors provide a definition of their genre while they also apologise for their choice of subject following the golden mean suggested by Aristotle also in wittiness. (cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1128a, 1128b.) Similar “apology” can be read in the *Praefatio* of Poggio Bracciolini's *Facetiae* (Bracciolini, 1983: 108), but Roman poets, like Martial made excuses in the same manner for their “*lusus*”, for more on this see: Horváth, 1956.

¹⁴ I refer here to the episode of the flattering jester (cap. 23.) or that of the intriguing Nicholas Modrusiensis (cap. 13.) and to the praise of Nicholas Bathur and Urbanus(!) Jauriensis (cap. 31–32.).

The aim of Galeotto's work was not only to immortalise the memory of the king and that of the court but also his own self-fashioning by means of frequent references to himself.¹⁵ It is not an accident that he presents himself as *vir facetus* as well, when discussing why the king liked him so much: "qui propter suam universalem disciplinam et facundiam lepidam atque iocosam regi erat carissimus." (Marzio, 1934: p. 26. [cap. 27.]) Galeotto gladly identified himself with this role. Here we don't have opportunity to present the comic anecdotes about his life that came down to us, however, we have to mention that these must have been influenced by the ideas of his works as well (For more on this see: Ábel, 1880: passim.). It is not by chance either, that Bonfini assigned the part of Epicuro to Galeotto in his *Symposion*, and that Castiglione in the second book of the *Libro del Cortigiano*, when discussing the *facetudo*, tells a joke attributed to Galeotto himself (Castiglione, 1981: 285.). Due to his character the Hungarian scholarship considered him for a long time only as a court-jester. Also Vilmos Gyenis who dealt with the relationship between the work and the facetious literature claimed that Galeotto was successful in this genre precisely because he himself was an entertaining *uomo di corte* (Gyenis, 1974: 689-691.).

But Galeotto was proud of being appreciated by the king not only due to his jokes but also due to his wide education ("propter suam universalem disciplinam...regi erat carissimus"). Galeotto regarded ignorance as principal sin, therefore one of the purposes of his writings, thus also of the *De dictis* was teaching. In my opinion the main originality of this work lays in that when depicting the life of the court he conveys ideas that reflect his own philosophy and field of interest. His short remarks on local religious customs and nourishment, on geographical, linguistic and etymological issues occur also in his other writings.¹⁶ The detailed analysis of the scientific and philosophical content of the *De dictis* in the light of his other works merits another paper, but let me mention only a few of these connections. His natural philosophical, medical and astrological interest was esteemed by Johannes Vitéz as well and he dedicated his book entitled *De homine* (Matthias Corvinus, 2008: 496.) to Vitéz, in which he discusses his ideas on medical astrology. To illustrate their similar mentality we mention for example that they amended together the *Astronomicon* of Manilius (See most recently: Csillag, 2008: 146.). It would be superfluous here to present the interest of Matthias in astrology, therefore we only refer to the fact that after the death of Johannes Vitéz it was right Galeotto - among others - who represented this kind of education in the court. The

¹⁵ For the impression of authenticity he always speaks about himself in singular 3rd person. His self-references outline also the typical gestures of a patronising ruler towards his wandering humanist: he receives present at New Year's Day from the king (cap. 24.), or engagement present for his daughters (cap. 28.), and the ruler released him from the Venetian prison (cap. 27.).

¹⁶ Here, in the *De dictis* see for example in cap. 6, 17, 22, 27, 28.

role of astrology in his world view is testified also by his claim, namely that a physician who is not expert in astrology is a physician only in name but rather a pharmacist.¹⁷ Thus he paraphrases the thesis of Galen who stated that a good physician must be a philosopher at the same time. We cannot leave unmentioned here the fact that Ficino dedicated his *De vita coelitus comparanda* to Matthias, in which he also expresses his belief in the stars and their relationship with diseases.¹⁸ The central role of astrology in Galeotto's works must be highlighted here because he often relates astrology to the king, moreover in the *De incognitis vulgo* he calls the king as "*rex et astrologus*." (ed. in: Ábel, 1880b: 255.). In the *De dictis* he explains the king's sharp judgement about the courtiers with the king's expertise in astrology and physiognomy.¹⁹ According to Galeotto, as he claims in the preface of his *Chyromanzia*, the ruling laws of the macrocosm are reflected in the microcosm besides astrology also by physiognomy (Marzio, 1951.). Thus, in his opinion, the good ruler must be expert in this knowledge in order to apply these theories in the good government. For this same reason in the *De doctrina promiscua* Galeotto names Lorenzo de' Medici good physician, who cures the diseases of the society, alluding also to the metaphor of medicus-Medici (For more on this see: Békés, 2006b.).

Galeotto's philosophy was Aristotelian, he criticised the Neoplatonist philosophers, moreover, he claimed, that the immortality of the soul cannot be proven by the "rational" arguments of philosophy. The fact that King Matthias released him out of the prison of the Venetian inquisition, and that despite of his heretical views he spent so many years at the Buda court is to be explained with the king's esteem of his person and his philosophy and that his natural philosophy contained elements which formulated part also of the self-representation of the ruler.²⁰ This case might also contribute to the ongoing revision of the former idea, that attributed an almost exclusive role to Neoplatonism in the intellectual life of the royal court in Buda.

¹⁷ *De doctrina promiscua*, cap. 14., ed. in: Marzio, 1949: 96.

¹⁸ „Denique concludamus cum Galeno, astrologiam esse medico necessariam.” In: Ficino, 1566: 205.

¹⁹ “astrorum cognitio et physionomiae scientia” In: Marzio, 1934: 12. (cap. 13.) For more on this see: Békés, 2006.

²⁰ I refer here to the role of physiognomy in Matthias' visual representations and to the “*medicus-Medici*” analogy which had several other manifestations both in the Renaissance Florentine literature and painting.

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