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“A woman of valour”: towards a reappraisal of the presence of Beatrix of Aragon in the Hungarian court*

In the delicate matter of choosing a royal wife few kings could follow their hearts, since marriage was an alliance of two families, undertaken for dynastic reasons. Calculating the relative merits of various candidates, must have been the subject of much discussion, though it generally goes unrecorded in state papers and archives.

Even before reaching royal estate, Matthias had been betrothed as a child in a peace-broking arrangement with the rival Cillei family, but the marriage, which took four years to negotiate (1451-1455), was never consummated due to Elisabeth Cillei's early death when Matthias was still only twelve years old (Kubinyi, 2008: 25 and Réthelyi, 2008: 247). At the beginning of 1458, Matthias's supporters pledged him to the Count Palatine László Garai's daughter (Lupescu, 2008c: 192). However in the same year, while held captive in Prague, he was also betrothed to his captor's daughter, Catherina Podiebrad (Réthelyi, 2008: 248; Kubinyi, 2008, 54; 67). They were married in 1461 when he was eighteen and Catherina twelve, with consummation postponed for two years, but before a third year had elapsed she died in childbirth.

The most remarkable fact about the subsequent choice of a wife for Matthias is how long it took to accomplish. Catherina died in January 1464. His betrothal to Beatrix in Naples was announced in May, 1475, though the dowry was not finally fixed until the spring of 1476,¹ and another eight months or so elapsed before her arrival at the king's court.²

*An abbreviated version of this paper has been published in the 2013 Annual of Medieval Studies at CEU.

¹ BERZEVICZY, 1911: I, 93-6, 108. Negotiations had reopened with the return of Nicholas Bánfi and George Handó to Naples in the spring of 1474, and a further exchange of ambassadors in 1475. The figure of 170,000 pieces of gold and 30,000 in jewels finally settled upon is considered by Berzeviczy an unusually large dowry even for a princess, though eclipsed later by others, for example, Lucrezia Borgia on her marriage to the Duke of Ferrara in 1502.

For twelve years the king had remained single and without an heir. These were embattled years, with campaigns first against domestic enemies, then against the emperor to retrieve possession of the Hungarian crown, against the Turks and, from 1468, against his former father-in-law in Bohemia. Yet even amidst the distractions of war, negotiations had opened soon after the death of Catherina, with at least three candidates of princely rank in Saxony, Brandenburg and Milan (Berzeviczy, 1911: I, 91.). According to a Venetian report, in 1465 Matthias was being urged to consider Beatrice's older sister Eleonora, but rejected her on the grounds of insufficient beauty,³ though this did not seem to deter the fastidious house of Este in Ferrara where Eleonora became mother to six children including the outstanding beauty Isabella.⁴

There followed fruitless negotiations for a daughter of Casimir IV in Poland,⁵ and for the daughter of the Emperor Frederick.⁶ Matthias's continued single state was thus not a matter of deliberate choice, and indeed there are hints of other women (Kubinyi, 2006: 34, and 2008, 134). There was certainly one other serious liaison, with Barbara Edelpöck, by whom he had a son, Janus Corvinus, but she was not considered an

² After a proxy marriage and coronation in Naples on 15th September, 1476, the new queen travelled through Italy, being feted as she went, and was met by her husband at Székesfehérvár on 10th December, where she was crowned again on 12th, and the marriage solemnised in Buda on 22nd.

³ BERZEVICZY, 1911: I, 91, n.3, citing the report of the Venetian ambassador in Milan, 21st November, 1465. The assumption that it was Eleonora and not Beatrix rests on the fact that Beatrix was at this time betrothed to the Duke of Sessa.

⁴ Eleonora married Duke Ercole of Ferrara in 1473. Her eldest daughter Isabella d'Este (1474-1537) married the Marquis of Mantua and became patron and muse to many gifted artists including Mantegna Ariosto, Raphael, Titian and Castiglione. Eleonora's younger daughter Beatrice (1475-97), named after our Beatrix, was renowned for her beauty too. For witness to the beauty of Beatrix, see BERZEVICZY, 1911: 142.

⁵ His daughter Hedwig, granddaughter of the Emperor Sigismund, was of impeccable title, but the overture was not entertained seriously on the Polish side. By 1471-2 Casimir was openly trying to supplant Matthias in his own kingdom.

⁶ Ideas of a rapprochement with the Emperor, to be sealed with the hand of his five-year-old daughter Kunigunde, or possibly his niece, were fostered by Vitéz in 1469, despite the long wait that would be involved. The Hungarian nobility were opposed to a German match, but in any case negotiations foundered. Matthias's visit to Vienna in 1470 produced no useful result. RÉTHELYI 2008: 248; TANNER, 2008: 79.

appropriate candidate for marriage.⁷ The daughter of a king or at least a duke was *de rigueur*.

On Beatrice's side, after the dissolution of an unfulfilled childhood marriage to her cousin the Duke of Sessa, her future must have been an important diplomatic priority, but any records of this have not yet been adequately exposed. Berzeviczy relates that in October 1473 her brother was seeking a matrimonial alliance in Burgundy. Although this was primarily for himself, double marriages were common; however he came back empty handed (Berzeviczy, 1911: I, 89-90). Berzeviczy also hints that her father may have still been considering a Venetian or Milanese wedding as late as the beginning of 1475, in spite of the fact that dowry negotiations with Matthias were in progress from 1474.⁸

Besides questions of rank, diplomacy, dowry, and, of course, the avoidance of consanguinity, what personal criteria were applied in considering candidates for marriage?⁹ Certainly norms of beauty had to be met, as is attested by the frequent exchange of portraits or busts. There are several copies of busts of Beatrix by Francesco Laurana.¹⁰ Portraits could of course mislead: Hans Holbein's fine miniature of Anne of Cleves oversold her looks to Henry VIII, with well-known consequences. On her arrival in England, he dubbed her the "Flanders Mare" and made haste to divorce her. On judgements of character, we have even less evidence, because excessive praise and formulaic comparisons were the norm.

However, guidance on the qualities needed for a successful marriage may be found in several contemporary sources and it may be illuminating to consider some of these. The Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino turned his attention to the question of marriage on two occasions. In a letter *In Praise of Matrimony* written to Antonio Pelotti, around the time of Matthias's marriage, he reminds his friend how Socrates had learned more philosophy from his two wives, Xanthippe (the famous "shrew") and

⁷ KUBINYI, 2008: 134. Kubinyi suggests, citing Tubero, that he intended to marry her but was advised against it. She was the daughter of a commoner, a wealthy burgher of Stein in Lower Austria. They met in Vienna in 1470, and she appears to have remained with him until the arrival of Beatrix in 1476.

⁸ IBID. By 30th July 1475, when Beatrix signs herself Queen of Hungary in a letter to the pope (see BERZEVICZY, 1914: 19-20), the couple were formally betrothed.

⁹ RÉTHELYI, 2008: 247 stresses only the dynastic considerations. I have not been in a position to search archives, but it is inherently unlikely that detailed accounts of discussions on character would be preserved.

¹⁰ This tends to confirm that her marriage was the subject of negotiations in several places. For one of these busts, see FARBAKY ET AL., 2008: 246.

Myrto, than from the philosophers Anaxagoras and Archelaus.¹¹ Pelotti should consider how family life will expand his capacity for skilful governance, patience and compassion. However, there is little talk of the qualities required of a wife, who was perhaps still entirely hypothetical in Pelotti's case.

In a letter to Francesco Berlinghieri, headed *The greatest care should be taken about marriage and marriage-arrangements*, Ficino discusses the qualities to be sought in a son-in-law. He directs his friend to inner character and virtue, rather than external circumstances. He should be "prudent, strong, just and trustworthy." Loyalty and diligence are to be preferred to wealth. He asks, "Would you acquire a man ... just for show when occasion demands it, or to strengthen the family bond for your own material gain, as if it were some kind of building?" He concurs with Cicero, "I would rather have a man who needs money than money which needs a man." (Ficino, 1994: 61-62; Cicero, *De officiis*, II, xx, 71. Cicero is quoting Themistocles, the Athenian general). On daughters-in-law, Ficino simply quotes Plautus, "She comes with sufficient dowry if she comes with good character." (Plautus, *The Pot of Gold*, 239).

Ficino's advice certainly reached Matthias, but not in time to influence his choice of Beatrix.¹² So we must look to other texts that may have shaped expectations of womanly virtues. Among these are saints' lives¹³ and the collections of women's lives modelled closely on them, a form popularised by Giovanni Boccaccio and updated by Jacopo Filippo Foresti of Bergamo,

¹¹ FICINO, 1981: 69-71. That Socrates married twice is related by PLUTARCH, *Life of Aristides*, 36, and is based on earlier sources, but the facts remained obscure and disputed. For recent discussion see FITTON: 1970 and WOODBURY: 1973. However the presence of two wives as a guarantee of domestic strife is reflected in EURIPIDES, *Andromache* 465ff. and SENECA, *Hercules Oetaeus*, 256-285. Moral philosophy might be learned from their quarrels. Socrates's low opinion of Anaxagoras's natural philosophy is described in PLATO, *Phaedo* 97c-99d; Archelaus is delineated as a foolish and evil tyrant in PLATO, *Gorgias*. The comparison is therefore not entirely favourable! Pelotti is best known as translator of Moschus's *Dell'amor fuggitivo*.

¹² The period of Ficino's influence in Hungary really begins with Beatrice's arrival. The first letter cited is dated 30th October, 1480, but it may not have reached Matthias until 1484 since the original presentation copy was stolen en route. The second letter also from 1480, reached Matthias later still. The volumes prepared for Matthias, currently in the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, are the subject of a paper in preparation.

¹³ An abundant genre, including, in Hungary, the life of Margaret, daughter of King Bela IV, translated into Hungarian in the early fourteenth century (*Boldog Margit Legendája*). See KLANICZAY, 1985: 55-57 for an English extract.

whom I shall discuss later. But first in importance is the biblical Book of Proverbs, ascribed to the wise king Solomon. Chapter 31 presents the classic formulation of womanly virtues and was deeply ingrained in peoples' thinking.¹⁴ It describes a *mulierem fortem*, a strong woman or woman of valour, that is, a woman of almost manly worth; not by accident was Beatrix the Queen who agreed to accompany her husband on active campaign in the first year of their marriage.¹⁵ Besides its memorable poetic imagery, the Proverbs text tells us that a woman of valour is trustworthy, prudent, benevolent and loyal. She is industrious and resourceful, energetic and generous. She is practically minded, and can engage both in trade and skilled manufacture. She takes care of a large household, providing for all, but especially for her husband who has a different part to play, on a wider stage. Eloquence comes within her compass but she lives by the law of kindness. In one line, her clothing is "fine linen and purple" but in another "strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come." The passage concludes by warning that grace is deceitful and beauty vain; fear of the Lord is the basis of real valour, and a person is known by their deeds (Proverbs 31:10-31).

Measuring how far Beatrix conformed to this model would not be an easy matter. Nevertheless examples spring readily to mind: her ability to deliver a public oration in Venice (Berzeviczy, 1911: I, 134-5; Bonfini, *Decades*, IV, 4, 36-8), her involvement in the beautification of the royal palaces and library (Mikó, 2008, 253; Laszlovszky, 1995:19-25), her care over the cultivation of salad stuffs for the royal table.¹⁶ She dealt with financial matters,¹⁷ hired leading musicians from abroad,¹⁸ and so on. But when it came to the idea of "let her deeds praise her in the gates", there was no one

¹⁴ The wit of the Hebrew original, an acrostic covering every letter of the alphabet and therefore symbolically indicating completeness, is lost in translation, but the meaning is faithfully represented in Latin. For examples of its use in sermons on female saints, see *SERMONES COMPILATI*, 1993: 186, 196, 293, 296, 297.

¹⁵ In 1477 Matthias established her in the former university buildings at Pozsony, from which she had access to her husband's military camp by a small bridge constructed for the purpose. See KLANICZAY, 1990: 600.

¹⁶ Lettuce was in widespread medicinal as a soporific, but salads had quite recently become popular in Italy, as fresh or cooked greens and herbs with oil, vinegar and salt. *PLATINA*, IV, 1-15 (MILHAM, 1998: 212-225).

¹⁷ For negotiations with the mining towns that supplied her income after the King's death, BONFINI, 1941: I, 1, 77 and IV, 5, 162; HATVANI, 1857: 10-13; BERZEVICZY, 1911: II, 160-165. BERZEVICZY, 1914: 152, 281; REES, 2005: 7-8.

¹⁸ See VENDRIX in this volume. MIKÓ, 2008: 252-3. Also for Beatrix's early musical training, *ATLAS*, 1985.

after the king's death to vouch for those deeds, for she had no children to "call her blessed", and, as we shall see, her former eulogist, Bonfini, became her detractor.

A second type of text is the private communication, such as the advice given to Beatrix on her departure from Naples by Diomedea Carafa (Caraffa, 1894; Carafa, 1988. See also Mikó, 2008: 252 and 258-9). As a senior nobleman in the court of Naples and her lifelong tutor, Carafa had no need to flatter her. He reminds her of the conduct appropriate to a queen, principles that he says she already knows and practises. He starts from reverence for God, stressing both its private aspects and its public expression. Privately it includes compassion, prayer and mindfulness of Christ's passion. Worldly affairs, though they press in on life, are the "vanity of vanities" compared with salvation. While heaven is the place of eternity and glory, the punishments of hell are specifically for those who fail to fulfil the purpose for which they were created.

Public aspects of reverence include her presence at the celebration of the Mass, receiving pardon, taking pleasure in holy things and opposing the enemies of religion. Through her example she will be responsible for the well-being of her subjects' souls (Caraffa, 1894: 30). Detailed instructions on the protocols of departure follow, including advice that she should give a public oration in the cathedral before leaving, and how she should handle a variety of practical problems both on the journey and in her new land. Kindness and careful supervision are paramount. Finally, she should keep up a frequent and affectionate correspondence with her family and with the pope — not, we may note, because he is the highest authority in Christendom, but because it will boost her reputation among a nation who hold the apostolic seat in higher esteem than do other Christian nations (Caraffa, 1894:47). Despite this cynical remark, his advice is solidly based in religious precept, suggesting that, whatever the excesses of court life in Naples, biblical ideals have been upheld in the princess's education. In an impartial account of the royal wedding there is no hint of behaviour that would disappoint the high expectations laid upon her (Report of the Imperial Count Palatine's envoy, in Schwandner, 1746: I, 519-27), though admittedly ritual, tradition and ceremony may mask many a flaw. On the other hand, more positively, ritual and ceremony may help a person rise to new challenges.

A third source on virtues is the semi-private text of Antonio Bonfini's *Symposion de virginitate et pudicitia coniugali*, composed in 1484-5.¹⁹ This was a text designed to impress and to be read aloud before members of the court.²⁰ Bonfini presents an idealized view of the royal marriage, with Beatrix a model of feminine intelligence and virtue. She is represented as bright of intellect and gracious of speech. In the section describing her youth (III, 752ff.), we are given a picture of days divided between religious training, education with her brothers, and womanly work, all carried out in the constant contemplation of God, to inculcate a spiritual concentration and intensity of love that was naturally transferred to her husband on their marriage (Bonfini, 1943: 182-3. See also Rees, 2005: 9).

However this idyllic picture underwent some change as time passed. In his *Rerum ungaricum decades*, written at the Hungarian court, Bonfini is at first still complimentary. He refers as before to her auspicious loveliness, her incomparable modesty and her nobility, and he praises again her ability to speak in public (IV, iv, 37; Bonfini 1941: 67). He also refers the reader to his earlier *Symposion* for further details. By IV, vii, his tone is more critical: the superlatives of virtue are reserved for King Matthias, while the queen is castigated for extravagance and "insane" expense (The word 'insane' is used three times between IV, vii, 85 and IV, vii, 113). A little further on, he claims that access to the king, and hence the king's own popularity, was greatly reduced by her influence (IV, viii, 258). But this comment is made as an aside. It interrupts the flow of the argument in such a way that it may be an interpolation added later to please Vladislaus II (Bonfini 1941: 167). This is the last comment of substance on her character, although as the narrative unfolds unseemly motives are routinely assigned to her actions. Thus her alleged overtures of marriage to the emperor Maximilian in 1490 are reported as ambition ("*uti Augusta foret*", at IV, ix, 137; Bonfini 1941: 181.) and her desire for marriage to Vladislaus later the same year is presented as clinging to power ("*ut in pristina dignitate maneret*", at V, i, 4; Bonfini 1941: 207). To Beatrix such steps may have seemed her sole chances of survival in a hostile world. Bonfini trims his tale to suit his new patron, King Vladislaus. He presented the first four books to Vladislaus in July, 1492. For

¹⁹ BONFINI, 1943. Bonfini claimed that his view of her character was formed from enquiries among those who knew her. When he traveled to Vienna to present this work in January, 1487, it won for him the post of Queen's reader.

²⁰ In a recent article, László Szörényi stresses the breakdown of the marriage as the context for this work. He discusses the views of Péter Kulcsár, who saw Matthias as the real patron of the work, interpreting it as endorsing Matthias's right to put Beatrix aside, and those of Klára Pajorin, who emphasized how the work enhanced Beatrix's prestige. SZÖRÉNYI, 2012: 121.

this he was crowned poet laureate and granted a patent of nobility. He was thus hardly at liberty to censure Vladislaus for his outrageous exploitation of Beatrix. By the time he wrote his harsher judgments of the queen, the new king was busy repudiating the secret marriage by which he had gained control of her resources. Yet Bonfini even then was not so brazen as to deny that Vladislaus had defrauded the queen; he simply says that considerations of national security had made it necessary, and asserts that he had given her no sign of affection to support her belief that he really intended to marry her. In short, Bonfini's apparent change of view about Beatrix may have more to do with his own circumstance than with hers.²¹

The kind of data that would help us to answer questions about her character more objectively are in short supply. We know relatively little about the tenor of her daily life in Hungary or of her companions. We know surprisingly little about her brothers and their time in Hungary. Her elder brother Giovanni, Archbishop of Esztergom from 1479 until his early death in 1485, spent very little time in Hungary. Apart from one short visit to his see during 1479 to 1480, he resided in Rome or Naples. Her younger brother Francesco lived with her in Hungary from the age of fifteen in 1476 until 1484, dying only two years after his return to Naples. We also know little about her Italian confessors. The Franciscan Gabriel Rangoni of Verona, Bishop of Eger (in Hungary until 1479) was an early confidant. Antonio of Jadra (Zara), a Dominican from Dalmatia, may have been prior of the Buda Dominican monastery and was her confessor. An unidentified Italian from Altavilla was with her from 1485, replaced in 1489 by one Jacobo (= Giacomo of Parma?) and in 1490, by Lodovico of Verona (Berzeviczy, 1912 : II, 72). Further study of these churchmen and of the ladies of her circle would be of great value.

In 1480, Beatrix decided to reward one, Antonio of Jadra, with the Bishopric of Modrus, a benefice she might reasonably consider to be within the royal gift.²² However the pope appointed Christopher of Ragusa to that see. Though clearly thwarted in the outcome of her plans, Beatrix

²¹ It must remain a matter of speculation whether Bonfini had quarreled with the queen during his brief period in her employ. The distressing plight in which the queen found herself might have provoked outbursts unpleasant enough to alienate a former friend. Either way, by 1488, Bonfini's attentions were focused entirely on the king, not the queen, having been appointed to serve the king as historian. See also discussion below of the way the relationship between the royal couple changed in these years).

²² Petrus Ransanus, Antonio's compatriot, describes him as "*vir pontificii iuris peritus et imprimis humanus, ideoque divae Beatrici Hungarorum reginae incredibiliter charus*", RANSANUS, 1977: 63.

nevertheless became great friends with the Ragusan – which may give the lie to those who stress her willful tendencies.

Yet opportunities for conflict and clash of wills began to proliferate from the mid-1480s. In the continued absence of any child from their marriage, Matthias became intent upon arranging the succession upon his illegitimate son, Janus Corvinus. By 1488 he was negotiating a suitable marriage for him as heir to the throne. Beatrix opposed every move that favoured him as one that undermined her. Whether she still clung to the hope that she might bear a child or whether she simply nurtured ideas of being herself the heir to the throne, she seems to have been convinced of her own ability to rule after the death of her husband, despite opposition from leading members of the court. Aragonese daughters were educated to rule in their husbands' stead during temporary absences.²³ Certainly conflict over the succession led to fierce arguments and strained relations between Matthias and Beatrix in these years, and when Matthias died in 1490, the unresolved question intensified strife at court, making it hard to find reliable witnesses of the qualities with which Beatrix now faced the adversities that came upon her. Her reputation was further worsened by her loyal devotion to the unpopular Ippolito, her sister's child, whom she had adopted and for whom she had secured the Archbishopric of Esztergom. This appointment did not receive papal confirmation until 1497, but he was made a cardinal in 1493. The callous way in which Ippolito later treated her suggests the relationship was complex and unsatisfying, and probably therefore widely misinterpreted by contemporaries.

In fact, hatred of the queen was rampant even before the king died. It is reported by the ambassador to Naples in 1489 (Berzeviczy, 1912: II, 109-113). In 1490, according to the Croatian historian Tubero, writing within living memory of events, Johannes Filipecz, Bishop of Nagyvárád, told the new king, Vladislaus, at their first meeting on 31st July of that year, to beware of Beatrix and to avoid marrying her. This speech is certainly of Tubero's own devising, but is probably not pure invention.²⁴ He reminds the new king of her sterility and adds – either maliciously or salaciously –

²³ BERZEVICZY, 1911: I, 50. The close relations between Beatrix and her elder sister, documented in BERZEVICZY, 1914, allowed Beatrix insight into the duties of a trusted consort.

²⁴ Filipecz warns there is already a coterie at court who plan to take advantage of her "Italian fashion" (suggesting a well-deserved taste of her own medicine): "*Italica sane arte, ut Hungari impudenter praedicabant adversus Italiam usi. Hungari enim Italicae genti fraudem maxime obiicere solent.*" TUBERO, 1603: fol. 23; 1746: 128.

that there are other reasons he should keep away from her which he cannot mention for reasons of “shame” (Berzeviczy, 1912: II, 148; Tubero, 1746: 140-143). What these horrendous vices are is left unclear. Vladislaus himself was no paragon of virtue: he was already bound to Barbara of Brandenburg at the time of his duplicitous feigned marriage to Beatrix.²⁵

Tubero admits that Beatrix could not have a fair hearing in Hungary, and he ascribes anti-Italian feelings principally to resentment of rapacious Italian clerics (TUBERO, 1603: fol. 22). Outside Hungary, Beatrix was regarded in a better light. In Venice, her career inspired the young Cassandra Fedele. Writing to Beatrix in 1487, Cassandra exclaims, “Do not all men of letters praise, exalt and glorify you as pure, just and an emblem of every virtue?” (ROBIN, 2002: 76-77). In January 1488, Cassandra praises “the magnitude of a mind so schooled in prudence, wisdom and experience” (IBID: 77). Her intellect, religious piety and power are also praised. By 1497, just as Beatrice’s reputation in Hungary has plummeted to its lowest point, Cassandra is still venerating her as a deity (IBID: 78-79).

In Naples, in 1489, Giovanni Marco Cinico of Parma (1430-1503), recalls her “bright and heroic virtues” which will win for her a certain place among the demi-gods. (See Figure 1, Dedication letter of the printed edition of Robert of Lecce’s sermons, *De laudibus sanctorum*). Cinico had been carrying out scribal work for the royal court in Naples since before Beatrix’s marriage, including the fine copy of Carafa’s treatise addressed to her mentioned above (MIKÓ, 2008: 258-9). He set up a printing press in Naples with Matthias Moravus of Olomouc. Besides the sermons of Robert of Lecce they printed Diomede Carafa’s *Dello ottimo cortesano*, also dedicated to Beatrix. Another associate of Cinico’s, Christopher Moravus, also sent Beatrix a copy of Tinctoris’s treatise *De inventione et usu musicae*, with a letter of recommendation for Johannes Stockem.²⁶

²⁵ This unconsummated marriage was later dissolved by the Pope in order to free him to marry Bianca Maria Sforza (who at the time of this reported meeting was betrothed to Janus Corvinus). Thus his marriage to Barbara was still binding at the time of the secret and fraudulent marriage he undertook with Beatrix.

²⁶ See the article by VENDRIX (Philippe) in this volume, and MIKÓ, 2008: 252.



Fig. 1. *Sermones de laudibus sanctorum* of Robert Caracciolus of Lecce, ©The British Library Board, Shelfmark G 11747, fol. 8r.

Queen Beatrix's presentation copy with coat of arms, printed on fine vellum. This book was at one time considered lost. It was bequeathed to the Library as part of the Grenville collection in 1846.

Even the aging Augustinian chronicler-monk of Bergamo, Jacopo Filippo Foresti,²⁷ praised her virtues in wildly extravagant language, basing his knowledge of her not just on the word of her brother-in-law, Duke Ercole d'Este, but on what he had heard from three clerics who had recently returned from the court of Buda: Niccolo Maria d'Este, bishop of Adria, Thomas, bishop of Cervia and Pietro of Trani, co-adjutant bishop of Telese. These comments appear in the dedication of his *De plurimis claris scelestisque mulieribus*, printed at Ferrara in 1497 (Figure 2). Although it bears a fine illustration of Jacopo presenting his work to the queen in person, it is doubtful whether he ever went there, though he was said to have been at

²⁷ FORESTI (1434-1520) was an Augustinian of the Order of Hermits. His chronicles enjoyed great authority throughout Italy and beyond.

her sister Eleonora's court in Ferrara in 1491 and 1492.²⁸ Among the 182 women's lives presented, some of them based closely on Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, was that of Eleonora, praising her deep piety and unfailing kindness, and bringing the concept of admirable women wholly up to date for Beatrix. Like Boccaccio, Foresti includes notorious women as well as virtuous. Extravagant praise for Beatrix's own qualities dominates the preface, but with striking insight Foresti adds,

I have no doubt, most worshipful Queen, that if you read the lives of these women with due consideration, you will lift up your broken spirits, sunk so low through your manifold troubles.²⁹

He seems well acquainted with her situation, and offers these lives, good and bad, in a spirit of consolation.

²⁸ In 1494-1496 Jacopo was Prior of the Augustinian house at Imola and then Forli. Although a Jaco[b]us from Parma is mentioned as confessor in a letter from Beatrix to her sister Eleonora on 29th December, 1491 (BERZEVICZY, 1914: 209), it is unlikely that Jacopo Foresti travelled to Buda or Esztergom, despite the illustration; indeed the text suggests that he had not met Beatrix in person.

²⁹ "Indubitato etenim credo sacratissima regina si hasce mulierum vitas diligenti examine perlegeris. Quae iacentem tuum animum variisque molestiis deiectum parumper attoles." FORESTI, 1497: Prologue.

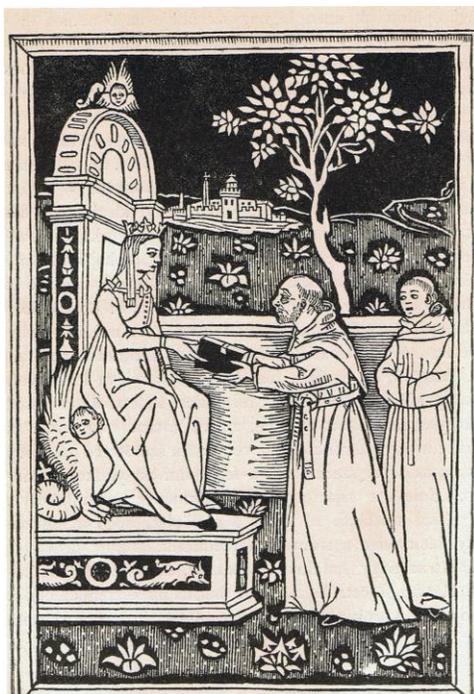


Fig. 2. Foresti presents his work to Queen Beatrix.
Centre of frontispiece, *De claribus scelectisque mulieribus*,
Ferrara: Laurentinus de Rubeis, 1497.

Besides receiving book dedications, Beatrix was involved in the patronage of important projects. Bonfini speaks of her influence over the rebuilding of the palaces, (Bonfini, 1941: 67, 135-8) and it is generally accepted that a refinement in decorative style dates from her arrival (See, for example, Farbaky, 2006). Confirming her involvement in commissions, Árpád Mikó has recently drawn attention to large shipments of red marble made in her name in 1487 and 1489, which seem to have been for use in the palace at Buda.³⁰ Tradition also associates with her the gardens of that palace.

There is little evidence so far of her involvement in any ecclesiastical or educational patronage. In England, Elizabeth Woodville, Anne Neville and Margaret Beaufort endowed institutions that have enjoyed unbroken

³⁰ MIKÓ, 2008 : 253. It is not easy to be sure of her role where joint coats of arms are displayed, but some joint involvement is generally assumed. After the king's death, Beatrix was obliged to focus her resources on more urgent matters than palaces.

existence to the present day.³¹ But we cannot know how far Beatrix involved herself in the lives of schools or churches where neither buildings nor records survive.³²

One aspect of patronage that does crop up in her letters is music, at least to the extent of bringing from afar musicians of the highest calibre for the royal chapel and court. We know little about the individuals beyond a few names (such as Johannes Stockem and the lutenist Pietro Bono) but the atmosphere of reverence and beauty created through music in the royal chapel formed a regular and important part of daily life that should not be underestimated.³³

Other areas of expenditure, for which she was later criticized, include costly clothing and household linens, and refinements in the culinary arts. All these too leave little trace, yet are completely in line with the biblical injunctions for a woman of valour, and undoubtedly transformed the experience of life at court.

Returning to her patronage of Ippolito, this was more than the bestowal of a benefice. After the untimely death of her brother Giovanni it probably seemed to her quite reasonable to keep the Archbishopric as a family possession, and she did, after all, regard Ippolito as an adopted son. Her letters reveal a charming naivety: in her delight at obtaining at last a longed-for child, Beatrix seems genuinely to have hoped that she could reform her wayward nephew and secure a family future.³⁴

The strength of her continuing bonds with family members also confirms the importance of dynastic aspects of marriage. We might

³¹ Three Cambridge Colleges, Queens', Christ's and St John's, as well as the Lady Margaret Professorship of Divinity each owe their existence to one of these royal wives; also Wimborne School, Dorset.

³² Signs of involvement in the affairs of convents or colleges are also absent from Beatrix's surviving letters, though letters do not necessarily cover activities that are near at hand.

³³ As a girl Beatrix had been a pupil of the outstanding musician Johannes Tinctoris. A *Choral* with musical notation has survived in Naples, inscribed "ad serenissimam ungherie Reginam...Regia progenies et regi nupta Beatrix". ATLAS, 1985: 116. See also ZOLNAY 1977 and KUBINYI 1999: 185-192. But for a sense of the significance of music in a religious setting, there is no substitute for the experience of choral services using music of the period in a contemporary architectural setting. The choirs of Magdalene College, Oxford, and Kings College, Cambridge, have kept this tradition alive in England. In Hungary its revival is flourishing. See contributions of DÉRI (Balazs) and FÖLDVÁRY Miklós).

³⁴ See letters to Eleonora on 25th April and 8th November 1486, BERZEVICZY, 1914: 100 and 102-3.

question why Matthias, in his years of secure and glorious rule, should have undertaken a marriage alliance with the notorious upstart King of Naples. For if Beatrix has suffered from hostile historians, so too did her father. But re-evaluation of his rule in Naples has already begun, and may help to resolve some of the underlying questions relating to such an alliance.³⁵

Taken as a whole, the events of Beatrix's life indicate a mixture of strength and vulnerability. She lost her mother at the age of eight, grew up in an unstable kingdom, with a father of capricious disposition. Granted an unusual degree of education and independence prior to marriage, she sacrificed that independence upon marriage. She moved from her familiar surroundings to a far larger kingdom, where she was on constant display before an unwelcoming court. She faced the desperate disappointment of childlessness, accompanied by fears that poison might be the cause. Furthermore, besides being constantly on display, she was required from time to time to play an active part in diplomacy for high stakes, both in person and by letter (Bonfini, *Decades*, IV, v, 257-262; Berzeviczy, 1911: I, 182-3). Yet her future was threatened by the presence of another heir, giving grounds for terrible rows with her one loyal supporter, her husband — though, unlike his English counterpart, there is no record that he ever considered divorce.³⁶

After the death of Matthias, Beatrix was ruthlessly exploited by his successor, Vladislaus. Tubero scarcely refers to Thomas Bakócz's role in this charade, but he was probably the prime mover, acting on behalf of a weak king. It must have been particularly hard for Beatrix to be obliged to live not just away from the court but in close proximity to Bakócz's quarters in Esztergom. The treatment meted out to her obliged her to fight for justice in the papal courts over many years, yet ultimately without satisfaction. In 1493 she suffered further loss, on the death of her sister, and in 1494 that of her father, followed shortly by her elder brother and his son. When she returned to Naples, it was to a kingdom where all of her remaining family were now exiles. When Beatrix in 1502 adopts the title *infelicissima* in her letters, we can have some understanding of its significance.³⁷ Yet following the course of her correspondence, one gains little inkling of emotional

³⁵ The analysis of his economic policy in ABULAFIA, 1990: 125-146 reveals a more thoughtful and enlightened side of his character than, for example, the lurid account in BURCKHARDT, 1945: 23.

³⁶ Henry VIII's divorce from Catherine of Aragon forms an instructive comparison.

³⁷ BERZEVICZY, 1914: 413 ff. Ironically, it was Foresti who gave to her late husband the opposite epithet *felicissimus*. FORESTI, 1490: fol. 261r.

trauma. Most of her letters are brisk in tone, written with a particular diplomatic or practical purpose to be attained. Unlike some letter collections of this period, there is little self-reflection. Her letters are rather the working papers of a busy negotiator, and were gathered together from archives long after her death, not an edited selection of discussions with friends such as we have from her contemporaries Marsilio Ficino or Angelo Poliziano.³⁸

In fact, reliable reflections of her inner life are very scant. Representations of Beatrix by artists and illuminators can give rise to diverging interpretation: a recent commentator, Marcus Tanner, sees only what he calls her “piggy eyes” and “double chin” in the Didymus codex and the white marble profile of the late 1480s;³⁹ I am inclined to see devotion and contemplative rapture, in her kneeling figure in the foreground of the 1487 Breviary illustration.⁴⁰ But these things are rather subjective, and do not really add to our stock of certain facts about the Queen.

[These three illustrations were discussed by other scholars at the Conference, and illustrations may be readily found elsewhere:](#)

Didymus codex: Morgan MS 496, fol. 2r

Lombard marble relief portrait: Budapest Fine Arts Museum

Breviarium: Cod. Urb. Lat. 112, fol. 8r

What we do know is that in 1491 her father sent an adviser to calm her, while his ambassadors worked for her cause in Rome (Berzeviczy, 1912: II,

³⁸ For her literary interests, which there has not been space to discuss here, see CSAPODI, 1967: 113-133; REES, 2005.

³⁹ Tanner, 2008: xi and 77. Didymus codex, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, Morgan MS 496 fol. 2r, CSAPODI, CSAPODI-GÁRDONYI, 1981: 60-61 and plate XLVII. ALEXANDER, 1994: 29, 70 and cat 13. Alexander ascribes the illuminations to Monte de Giovanni di Miniato. Lombard sculpture (unknown artist), Budapest, Museum of Fine arts, reproduced in MIKÓ-SINKÓ, 2000: 8.

⁴⁰ Vatican, Cod. Urb. Lat. 112: fol. 8r; CSAPODI, CSAPODI-GÁRDONYI, 1981: 65 and plate LXVI. The manuscript, written by Martinus Antonius a Florentine priest, was finished at the end of October 1487. Csapodi ascribes its illuminations to Attavante and a dated miniature indicates that they took five years to complete, so that the work was never presented to King Matthias. My earlier report of an alternative attribution to a workshop in Buda (REES: 2005: 22) was mistaken.

171).⁴¹ In 1494, the pope sent Orso Orsini, Bishop of Teano, to try and help her (Berzeviczy 1912: II, 207). But after much wrangling, the so-called marriage to Vladislaus was finally annulled in April 1500, to everyone's surprise and not without suspicions of bribery by Vladislav (Ibid: 234-243), and by the end of the year Beatrix left Hungary to spend most of her final years on Ischia in the company of two other dispossessed ladies, her niece Isabella and Jeanne, widow of Ferrandino (Ibid: 260-267). When she died in 1508, at the age of fifty one, her passing was noted kindly by Castiglione, (Ibid: 288) and by the poet Celio Calcagnini, who said she met good and bad fortune with an equal heart; he also records that she brought to Hungary wisdom and clemency, gentleness and generosity (Ibid. 289-290). Her tombstone, in the church of Church of St Peter Martyr in Naples bears the epitaph: "*Haec religione et munificentia se ipsam vicit.*" (Ibid: 294.) *Religio* and *munificentia* refer to dutiful observance and generosity; more unusual, I think, is *se ipsam vicit* (she conquered herself), suggesting that she finally came to terms with the great disappointments of her life. If she had managed to conquer the anger and frustration, and focus on the needs of others, then she surely had tried to apply in earnest those words of her psalter:

Let my words come to your ears, my Lady, and do not turn the beauty of your countenance from me. Turn our grief into joy, and our tribulation into rejoicing (*Psalterium Beatae Mariae Virginis*, 1991: fol. 7v).

It has been nearly a hundred years since the last serious biography of Beatrix. While Tanner's book, *The Raven King*, stands clearly in the tradition of her prejudiced detractors, other recent work both in this volume and elsewhere,⁴² has been directed towards the recovery of the details of her life, and through this it may be hoped that a more balanced reappraisal will emerge.

⁴¹ Francesco de' Monti, an experienced warrior and diplomat, was sent to Beatrix, and Ferrante expended considerable effort and money through his ambassadors in Rome on his daughter's behalf. For the constant flow of support from Naples during this period see BERZEVICZY, 1912: II, 169-190.

⁴² See especially ZSEMLYE, 1999; RÉTHELYI, 2008; MIKÓ 2008 and forthcoming. For recent comparative studies, see TOMAS 2003; DUGGAN, 1997; KLANICZAY, 2002; BRYCE. 2007.

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