

IPPOLITA MARIA SFORZA

*Duchess and Hostage  
in Renaissance Naples:  
Letters and Orations*



*Edited and translated by*

DIANA ROBIN and LYNN LARA WESTWATER

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Tel: 416/978-7074 Email: iter@utoronto.ca

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Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies

Tel: 480/965-5900 Email: mrts@acmrs.org

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## Introduction

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### *Ippolita Maria Sforza (1445–1488)*

When Ippolita Sforza, twenty years old, blonde, tall, slim, and famously learned, rode into Naples on 14 September 1465, King Ferrante clearly saw her as a high-value hostage. The daughter of the duke of Milan, Ippolita was already en route to Naples to celebrate her marriage to the king's son and heir when her brother-in-law Jacopo Piccinino was murdered while the king was hosting him at the Castelnuovo<sup>1</sup>—an event that would darken the already grim reputation of her father-in-law. Ippolita would survive Ferrante's vaunted hospitality<sup>2</sup> for twenty-three years to become one of the most influential women of her time. As the wife of the king's son and a member of the royal household, she served the king as his unofficial ambassador to Milan, the primary conduit for the exchange of ideas and information between him and her brother Galeazzo Maria Sforza, who became duke of Milan soon after her arrival in Naples. Ippolita's letters, and the dispatches she received in return from the two rulers and their agents, were a principal means of communication between the two states. Both her father-in-law the king and her brother the duke sought her advice and opinions. Since her supposedly private letters to her father, mother, and brother in Milan were regularly intercepted by the king's secretaries and ambassadors, she voiced her opinions about the royal family in Naples guardedly. Her awareness that her letters would be parsed by her enemies as well as her friends at court must be taken account in our interpretation of them.

Ippolita Sforza's letters and Latin orations are presented for the first time in English translation in this volume.<sup>3</sup> A significant number of Ippolita's autograph

1. Carlo Canetta, "La morte di conte Giacomo Piccinino," *Archivio storico lombardo* ser. 1, vol. 9, fasc. 2 (1881): 252–88; Lucio Cardami, "Diarii di Messer Lucio Cardami," in G. B. Tafuri, *Istoria degli scrittori nati nel regno di Napoli*, 3 (Naples: nella stamperia di Felice-Carlo Mosca, 1760), part 1, 495; Carol Kidwell, *Pontano: Poet and Prime Minister* (London: Duckworth, 1991), 95 and 371n16. Brief profiles of this and other significant figures named in this introduction may be found in the Glossary of Names, below.

2. Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, is the most famous source on Ferrante's savagery. Ferrante "was equalled in ferocity by none among the princes of his time... [H]e liked to have his opponents near him, either alive in well-guarded prisons, or dead and embalmed, dressed in the costume which they wore in their lifetime.... His victims...were even seized while guests at the royal table." Trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London: George Allen & Unwin; New York: Macmillan, 1928), 36–37.

3. Selected Italian letters of Sforza's appear in Ferdinando Gabotto's edition of Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, *Lettere inedite in nome de' reali di Napoli* (Bologna: Romagnoli-dall'Acqua, 1893) and in Bruno

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letters survive. She dictated hundreds of others to her two personal secretaries: her childhood teacher and confidant from Milan, the humanist Baldo Martorelli; and after his death, the celebrated poet and head of King Ferrante's literary academy, Giovanni Pontano. Her letters depict her own role in the most momentous events of her time: the frightening days and months following the public assassination of her brother Galeazzo in 1476; her younger brothers' repeated attempts to seize the Milanese throne after the murder; the bloody Pazzi conspiracy in Florence and its repercussions in the peninsula in 1478–1479; the invasion of Italy by a force of Ottoman Turks and their occupation of Otranto in 1480–1481; and her father-in-law King Ferrante's touch-and-go struggle to survive the cholera that threatened his life, his regency, and Ippolita's survival in Naples.<sup>4</sup> On a more visceral level, Ippolita's letters detail her rage and sorrow over her husband's serial sexual liaisons with both men and women, one of whom he moved into the family home in the Castel Capuano in the early 1470s.

Ippolita's last letters, written when she was in her early forties, betray one of the most enigmatic developments in her life. Among the gossips at Ferrante's court, Ippolita's estrangement from her husband Alfonso had long been the subject of speculation. At the same time, from 1483 on, Ippolita's last, emotionally charged letters to Lorenzo de' Medici, her confidant and friend of twenty years, had become suggestive of a relationship that would surely have compromised the duchess's honor had these letters become public.<sup>5</sup>

On 20 August 1488, at age forty-three, without having shown prior signs of any illness, Ippolita collapsed and could not be revived. Her death was attributed to a cerebral abscess.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the circumstances of Ippolita's death while resident in the household of a man reputed for brutality—and who may have arranged the death of Piccinino, her brother-in-law—raises questions.<sup>7</sup> Twenty years before, in 1468, her mother, the Dowager Duchess Bianca Maria Visconti, had died

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Figliuolo's edition of Pontano, *Corrispondenza di Giovanni Pontano segretario dei dinasti aragonesi di Napoli, 2 novembre 1474–20 gennaio 1495* (Battipaglia [Salerno]: Laveglia & Carlone, 2012), henceforth "Figliuolo." See now also the most complete edition of Sforza's letters to date: Ippolita Maria Sforza, *Lettere*, ed. M. Serena Castaldo (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2004), henceforth "Castaldo."

4. On Ferrante's attack of cholera in 1475 see Kidwell, *Pontano*, 114 and 272n55; Gabotto, *Lettere inedite*, nos. 9, 11–19, 21, 22; Figliuolo 13–22 (letters 11–21); and below, Letters 68–73, dated 12, 14, 16, 28, and 29 November 1475.

5. Letters 94–100, Ippolita's last letters to Lorenzo de' Medici, appear below accompanied by our analysis. No responses to these letters are found in Lorenzo's own vast published correspondence: the *Lettere*, edited by Nicolai Rubinstein and F. W. Kent, 16 vols. (Florence: Giunti-Barbèra, 1977–2011).

6. The cause of her death as *apostema nel capo* was offered by Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, the fifteenth-century Bolognese author of famous women's lives: *Gynevera de le clare donne*, ed. Corrado Ricco and Alberto Bacchi della Lega (Bologna: Romagnoli-dall'Acqua, 1888), 351.

7. See above, note 1.

unexpectedly at the same age. At the time, her contemporaries, among them the great Milanese historian of the fifteenth century, Bernardino Corio, had famously accused the duchess's son Galeazzo Sforza of her murder.<sup>8</sup> As yet, no credible charges of foul play have been raised in the case of Ippolita's premature death.

### *The Other Voice*

Ippolita Sforza belongs to the tradition of urban, classically educated Italian women who came of age as intellectuals in the later fifteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Three women, Isotta Nogarola, Cassandra Fedele, and Laura Cereta, all near contemporaries of Ippolita's, were well known in the Veneto as writers, having circulated in manuscript hundreds of their stylishly written Latin letters that called to mind the prose of Sallust, Cicero, and even Apuleius.<sup>10</sup> All three women studied Latin and Greek with humanist scholars: Nogarola with Martino Rizzoni, a student of the great humanist scholar Guarino Guarini; Fedele with the Hellenist and Servite friar Gasparino Borro; and Cereta with a cloistered nun and Latin scholar. Similarly, Ippolita studied Latin with Baldo Martorelli, a protégé of Vittorino da Feltre, the storied professor of rhetoric at Ferrara who established a humanist school at Mantua. She learned Greek from the émigré Hellenist Constantine Lascaris, who like Martorelli followed Ippolita to Naples where she continued her studies with both professors.

Meredith Ray and Sarah Ross have seen the birth of a feminist epistolary tradition in Europe in the humanist Latin writings of Nogarola, Fedele, and Cereta.<sup>11</sup> But Ippolita Sforza, whose Latin orations demonstrate her training as

8. For Corio, see Domenico Panebianco, "Documenti sull'ultima malattia di Bianca Maria Sforza e sulla peste del 1468," in *Archivio storico lombardo*, ser. 9, vol. 8 (1969): 367–80.

9. Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil, Jr., ed. and trans., *Her Immaculate Hand: Selected Works by and about the Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy*, 2nd ed. (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992).

10. Isotta Nogarola, *Complete Writings: Letterbook, Dialogue on Adam and Eve, Orations*, ed. and trans. Margaret L. King and Diana Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Cassandra Fedele, *Letters and Orations*, ed. and trans. Diana Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Laura Cereta, *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*, ed. and trans. Diana Robin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); see esp. Cereta's Apuleian dialogue, at 180–202. For the Latin letters in translation of even earlier humanist women writers such as Maddalena Scrovegni, Cecilia Gonzaga, Battista Montefeltro Malatesta, and Costanza Varano, see also King and Rabil, *Her Immaculate Hand*.

11. Building on King and Rabil's *Her Immaculate Hand* survey of the genesis of the tradition, see now Meredith Ray, *Writing Gender in Women's Letter Collections of the Italian Renaissance* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), esp. 22–25; and Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism. Woman as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), esp. 9–10, 144–59.

a classicist, wrote no letters on the rights of women; nor do her epistles champion the contribution of the female voice to philosophical, moral, or theological discourse as do those of her feminist contemporaries. Instead, Ippolita's letters demonstrate her influence in affairs of state as a woman and her ability to move policy at the highest levels of government, undiminished by her sex. Intellect trumps gender in the roles she assumes in her letters as unofficial ambassador, adviser, and informant.<sup>12</sup>

Ippolita Sforza's political action took place consistently: she went right to the issues to be negotiated, even those involving naval strategies when Milan and Naples came perilously close to a war at sea off the coast of Barcelona in 1472. When civil war loomed as it did at the outbreak of cholera in Naples in November 1475 or after the assassination of her brother Galeazzo in Milan in December 1476, her letters vividly portrayed the network of key relationships she had built over the years with men and women who would enable her to save her own and her children's lives.

Stylistically, Ippolita's correspondence operates on two levels. While her letters to family and friends follow Petrarch's dictum that personal correspondence should exemplify "a plain and friendly style of speech,"<sup>13</sup> her epistles to protonotaries, ambassadors, and heads of state display the formal elements of oratory that mark Cassandra Fedele's letter to Lodovico da Schio, the rector of the faculty of liberal arts at the University of Padua, thanking him for inviting her to speak there,<sup>14</sup> and Isotta Nogarola's epistle to the Venetian nobleman Ludovico Foscarini on his arrival as Verona's new governor.<sup>15</sup> Ippolita's letters contain no showpieces on humanist topics designed for manuscript publication such as Cereta's epistolary essay to Pietro Zecchi on women and marriage, or her Petrarchan letter on her ascent of Mt. Isola titled "A Defense of Epicurus."<sup>16</sup> Nor, on the other hand, do Ippolita's letters resemble the vernacular letters of her Florentine contemporary

12. Evelyn Welch comments in "Ippolita Maria Sforza, Duchess of Calabria," in David Abulafia, ed., *The French Descent into Renaissance Italy, 1494–1495: Antecedents and Effects* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1995), 35: "It was only in this last decade of her life that Ippolita's capabilities as a diplomat were finally appreciated by Ferrante and Alfonso."

13. Ronald Witt, "Medieval 'Ars Dictaminis' and the Beginnings of Humanism: A New Construction of the Problem," *Renaissance Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1982): 1–35, at 28–29. Petrarch, following Cicero, rejected for personal letters the *stilus sublimis*, prescribing instead *hoc mediocre domesticum et familiare dicendi genus amice*.

14. Fedele, *Letters and Orations*, 66–67.

15. Nogarola, *Complete Writings*, 128–31.

16. Cereta, *Collected Letters*, 65–72; 115–22.

Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi with their interest in such domestic matters as local gossip, the purchasing of flax, and the finding of a good wet nurse.<sup>17</sup>

Like the great humanist scholar-statesmen of her era, Leonardo Bruni and Francesco Barbaro, Ippolita understood her role to be an active force in politics. Some of her letters are diplomatic dispatches from the field, documenting her activity as emissary, informant, and intermediary between the courts of her natal and marital kin. After her father's death and her brother Galeazzo's accession as duke in 1466, Ippolita's letters to Galeazzo increasingly concern the fraught relations between Milan, Naples, Venice, Florence and the papacy more than ten years after their joining in a mutual defense league.<sup>18</sup> Acting as her brother's agent, she relays to him her observations and opinions of the foreign diplomats and local courtiers at Ferrante's court. At the same time, she counsels him on the conduct of negotiations with Genoa, Naples, Venice and France; and, above all, on the perilous making and unmaking of alliances. Whereas her correspondence from Naples had principally been directed to her father and mother until their deaths in 1466 and 1468, the majority of her letters from 1469 to 1476 address her brother Galeazzo, the reigning duke of Milan, and his turbulent relations with her father-in-law, King Ferrante.

Rebuilding a northern political alliance for herself after Galeazzo's assassination, Ippolita writes to key members of her immediate family: Galeazzo's wife, Bona of Savoy, a sister-in-law of King Louis XI of France; her other brothers Ludovico, Ascanio, and Sforza Maria; and Galeazzo's son and heir to the ducal throne, Gian Galeazzo Sforza. She also addresses a number of letters to Sacramoro da Rimini, the Milanese ambassador to Rome and papal insider, whom she calls her "dear friend." Galeazzo was as notoriously inept in his relations with his own councillors as he was with foreign leaders and their ambassadors.<sup>19</sup> Emotionally and politically situated after her marriage between her natal Milan and her adoptive kingdom in the south, Ippolita was able to speak candidly to her brother and he would listen—or so she thought.

Ippolita's meatiest letters are written to advise her brother, now that she is a titled duchess with an inside line to the king and his courtiers, and on occasion to pull him back from the brink of an international incident. Between 1471 and

17. Alessandra Strozzi, *Selected Letters of Alessandra Strozzi: A Bilingual Edition*, trans. with intro. and notes by Heather Gregory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Strozzi, *Letters to Her Sons, 1447–1470*, ed. and trans. Judith Bryce (Toronto: Iter Academic Press; Tempe, AZ: ACMRS [Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies], 2016).

18. Based on the Peace of Lodi signed between Venice, Milan, and Florence in 1454, Naples and the papacy joining in the resulting Italian League in 1455.

19. Gregory Lubkin, *A Renaissance Court: Milan under Galeazzo Maria Sforza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), esp. 232–46; Vincent Ilardi, "Towards the *Tragedia d'Italia*: Ferrante and Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Friendly Enemies and Hostile Allies," in Abulafia, 91–122.

1475, her letters to her brother are full of foreboding, reflecting, among other things, an ever-widening rift in the once-amicable relations between Galeazzo and her father-in-law Ferrante that threatened the peace of the peninsula. During these years, while Ippolita expresses her esteem for the ambassadors her brother dispatches to Naples, she soon makes equally clear her worry over his recall of men who, to her mind, had been his exemplary servants. In letter after letter, she advises Galeazzo to exercise caution. It is as if her epistolary narrative is heading inexorably for a disaster—a disaster that does come with the murder of the duke by his own courtiers on 26 December 1476.

Unlike her younger contemporaries Laura Cereta and Cassandra Fedele, Ippolita Sforza did not circulate her letters publicly.<sup>20</sup> Despite her fame as a highly educated woman involved in both policy-making and the arts, her Italian letters have remained for the most part unknown. The intellectual and political legacy of the themes voiced in her letters, however, which constitute an extraordinary public record of her ideas about governance, war, marriage, motherhood, family, and her own role in statecraft, can be seen in the generations of women writers who came after her. Ippolita's letters can be seen as prototypes both for the self-fashioning of the influential women epistolographers who would follow her and for the fictional female characters portrayed in dialogues, plays, and essays in early modern European literature.

The increasing volume and circulation of women's writings in the sixteenth century indicate that representations of the female voice became a matter of great interest.<sup>21</sup> The intense curiosity of the reading public about the nature of gender was now manifested in works by female authors from the fifteenth century on. In fact, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a proliferation of works that featured a new voice in Italian literature: that of the female author. The principal commercial presses in sixteenth-century Venice now published letter collections, dialogues, treatises, poetry books, and novels not only by women but by men impersonating women. In 1548, Ortensio Lando produced a bestseller, as Meredith Ray has shown, by publishing an anthology of 181 letters, most of them fictional, written by Lando himself, to be sold as the works of women.<sup>22</sup>

20. The letters of Cereta and Fedele that circulated in manuscript were collected and published in the seventeenth century by Giacomo Filippo Tomasini: *Clarissimae feminae Cassandreae Fidelis venetae epistolae et orationes posthumae* (Padua: Prostat apud Franceiscum Bolzettam, 1636); *Laurae Ceretae brixianensis feminae clarissimae epistolae* (Padua: Types Sebastiani Sardi, 1640).

21. Diana Robin, *Publishing Women: The Salons, the Presses, and the Counter-Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

22. Ray, *Writing Gender*; 45–52; Ortensio Lando, *Lettere di molte valorose donne, nelle quali chiaramente appare non esser ne di eloquentia ne di dottrina alli huomini inferiori* (Venice: appresso Gabriel Giolito de Ferrar[i]s, 1548).

While neither Ippolita Sforza's letters nor her life story were known by subsequent generations of women, her works live on as prototypes for the problems depicted in the autobiographical letters that early modern women would publish, either in printed volumes or in the manuscripts they circulated of their works. Their letters furnished testimony of their attitudes on education, motherhood, state governance, religion, medicine and the art of healing, war, and marriage—the most political of all institutions in early modern Europe. Ippolita's letters can be seen, then, as a matrix for the letters, dialogues, and treatises of Laura Cereta, Vittoria Colonna, Moderata Fonte, Lucrezia Marinella, Mary Beale, Anna Maria van Schurman, and the many other women writers who came after her.

If Ippolita Sforza's letters model what it was to "write like a woman," Moderata Fonte's dialogue *The Worth of Women* (1600) was simply an expansion of the epistolary female voice to seven voices, all female, in dialogue with one another. The subjects of Fonte's dialogue were those that Ippolita had aired in her letters, among them, marriage. Ippolita's earliest letters from Naples portray her deeply ambivalent feelings about her marriage. While she boasts early in the marriage of a conversation she had with her husband about a book on state governance, in the next breath she describes being locked in her chambers by her own lady's maid, which supposedly ensures the duchess's safety but also prevents her from spying on her husband. Such letters, though they remained unpublished and unknown, are nonetheless prototypes for the anti-marriage speeches of Fonte's fictional characters Leonora and Corinna in *The Worth of Women*.<sup>23</sup>

Ippolita's frequent letters to her mother also suggest a template for what Ross, in her analysis of Fonte's *The Worth of Women* has called the "feminization" of humanist *amicitia* (friendship), a term which in Cicero's dialogue of the same name portrayed the idealized friendship between men who were intellectual equals.<sup>24</sup> In Fonte's dialogue, as in Ippolita's letters to her mother, the conversation ranges across numerous subjects from politics to travel, representing a prototype of humanist friendships between women. But Ippolita also extended her Ciceronian idea of *amicitia* to her long-term relationship with Lorenzo de' Medici. Addressing him as "my dear brother," she wrote that the two friends "shared all things in common" (Letter 95: 7 April 1483). In this adaptation of *amicitia*, Ippolita anticipated the seventeenth-century Englishwoman Mary Beale's appropriation of Cicero's idealization of friendship as the basis for equality in between the sexes.<sup>25</sup>

23. See the discussion in Cereta, *Collected Letters*, 65–72; and Moderata Fonte (Modesta Pozzo), *The Worth of Women: Wherein is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*, ed. and trans. Virginia Cox (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 48–49, 54–55, 113–14, 257–58.

24. Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, 276–87.

25. Ross, *The Birth of Feminism*, 299–304.

Ippolita's engagement in the politics of the Neapolitan and Milanese courts and her letters to leading statesmen of the time anticipate the transnational community of male and female intellectuals that Carol Pal has so vividly described in her study of the circle of friends of the seventeenth-century Utrecht-born scholar Anna Maria van Schurman that extended from the Netherlands to England, Ireland, Germany and France.<sup>26</sup> Schurman created an epistolary network that "cut across barriers of religion, nation, class, intellectual allegiance, and family formation."<sup>27</sup> It included Katherine Jones, Lady Ranelagh, the French scholars Marie de Gournay and Marie du Moulin, and the Palatine Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia. Similarly, the seventeenth-century Venetian nun Arcangela Tarabotti, writing from the confines of the cloister, used her letters to build an international network of supporters.<sup>28</sup> The letters she published show her use of the epistolary form for self-promotion, social critique and public debate.<sup>29</sup> Collection of letters had come a long way since the fifteenth century when the letters of women were circulated for the most part privately.

Ippolita's letters on the invasion of Otranto by Ottoman Turks could also have served as prototypes for the moving dispatches on the wars and city sieges men and women published in the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Laura Cereta's letter to the Brescian magistrate Luigi Dandolo describing the bloody siege of Rovereto and Calliano by the German army in 1487 is a case in point.<sup>30</sup> Cereta had recalled the horror of the scene:

It has saddened and disgusted Christian hearts (I believe) that they had left so many innocent people homeless, slaughtered so many soldiers, destroyed so many city walls, laid waste so many fields, and lighted the blazing fires of a bloody war. For the war had already

26. Carol Pal, *Republic of Women: Rethinking the Republic of Letters in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

27. Pal, *Republic of Women*, 2.

28. See for example Lynn Lara Westwater, "A Rediscovered Friendship in the Republic of Letters: The Unpublished Correspondence of Arcangela Tarabotti and Ismaël Boulliau," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65, no.1 (2012): 67–134.

29. Arcangela Tarabotti, *Lettere familiari e di complimento* (Venice: Appresso li Guerigli, 1650), now in modern Italian and English editions by Meredith K. Ray and Lynn Lara Westwater: respectively, *Lettere familiari e di complimento* (Turin: Rosenberg and Sellier, 2005); and, translated by Ray and Westwater, *Letters Familiar and Formal* (Toronto: Iter Academic Press; Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012). See also Ray, *Writing Gender*, 196–99; and Arcangela Tarabotti, *Paternal Tyranny*, ed. and trans. Letizia Panizza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 19–28.

30. Cereta, *Collected Letters*, 160–64; see also Cereta's antiwar letter to Francesco Fontana, 153–58. Both letters suggest Bruni's writings on war: see C. C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence: The De militia of Leonardo Bruni* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961).

caused a great many courageous men to come together, and the result has been carnage on both sides and many men have lost their lives. Corpses now lie piled high in carts and are being hauled away on all sides. Was there not time for sorrow and pity—a time when bloodshed might have touched and softened men's minds?<sup>31</sup>

The legacy of Ippolita's political counsel to her brother was far-reaching. Half a century after the duchess' death, the poet Vittoria Colonna seemed almost to be imitating Ippolita's daily words of advice in her letters to her brother on how he should practice diplomacy with the pope and his other adversaries. Colonna wrote daily letters to her brother Ascanio in his armed conflict with Pope Paul III during the Salt War of 1541 that closely resemble Ippolita's letters counseling her brother Galeazzo on how to deal with her father-in-law, King Ferrante, and his ministers.<sup>32</sup> Colonna not only followed closely the events leading up to her brother Ascanio's war with the pope, but she acted as though she were her brother's ambassador to the Vatican, corresponding with members of the papal court. She wrote letters to the chief officer in charge of the field commissary in the pope's army, and even corresponded with Emperor Charles V, in the hope that he would intervene. Like Ippolita, Colonna counseled her brother Ascanio on each of the diplomatic moves that would bring to a close the pope's war against him, on the tone he should take in addressing the pope, and on the points he ought to propose to effect a compromise.

### *Biography*

On 18 April 1445, Ippolita Sforza was born in Pesaro, long a Sforza enclave on the Adriatic coast. Her parents were Bianca Maria Visconti, the only legitimate child of Duke Filippo Maria Visconti of Milan,<sup>33</sup> and Francesco Sforza, the commander-in-chief of Visconti's army and perhaps the greatest condottiere (mercenary general) of his day.

Ippolita was two years old when, after two centuries of Visconti rule, the citizens of Milan revolted. On the death of her grandfather Duke Filippo Maria Visconti on 13 August 1447, an elite group of Milanese noblemen, jurists, and

31. Cereta, *Collected Letters*, 161.

32. On Colonna's diplomacy, see Vittoria Colonna, *Carteggio*, ed. Ermanno Ferrero and Giuseppe Müller with a supplement by Domenico Tordi, 2nd ed. (Turin: E. Loescher, 1892), 214–27; and Robin, "The Salt War Letters of Vittoria Colonna," in *Publishing Women*, 78–101.

33. Bianca Maria Visconti was the legitimized daughter of the duke and his mistress Agnese del Maino.

ducal councilors assembled to declare the duchy a republic.<sup>34</sup> Elections were held and within five weeks, the new captains of the republic ordered the dismantling of the Visconti palaces and the burning of the city records. Milan's client cities revolted, refusing to pay taxes to Milan in return for its protection. The republic then hired Visconti's former condottiere, Francesco Sforza, to bring them back into the fold.

But in October 1448, Sforza defected from the republic himself, signing an agreement with the Venetians: they were to help him subjugate Milan and bring its client towns under their jurisdiction. By early 1449, civil war had broken out in Milan and most of the nobility had gone over to Sforza, abandoning the republic. Sforza now lay plans to take Milan not for Venice but himself. On 1 February 1449, he cordoned off access to the city, effectively stopping the flow of all foodstuffs into Milan. By fall and throughout the winter, famine held the city in its grip. The living fed on dogs, cats, and vermin; and the dead lay in the streets where they fell.

On 20 February 1450, Sforza entered the city unarmed. The Milanese surrendered to him, and on 26 March 1450, he was invested as duke of Milan. A year after the war's end, Sforza presided over the worst recorded plague in Milan's history. In 1451, thirty thousand citizens died in the epidemic. Ippolita was then six years old.

By 1450, Francesco Sforza had moved his wife and children from Pesaro to the ducal residence in Pavia. That year he appointed Baldo Martorelli as the teacher of his son Galeazzo and daughter Ippolita, then ages six and five.<sup>35</sup> In

34. On the Ambrosian revolution of 1447–1451, the primary sources are Giovanni Simonetta, *Rerum gestarum Francisci Sfortiae Mediolanensium ducis commentarii*, ed. Giovanni Soranzo, in *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, second series, 21.2 (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1932); Pier Candido Decembrio, *Annotatio rerum gestarum in vita Francisci Sfortiae IV Mediolanensium ducis*, in Decembrio, *Opuscula historica*, ed. Attilio Butti, Felice Fossati, and Giuseppe Petraglione, in *Rerum italicarum scriptores*, second series, 20.1 (Bologna: N. Zanichelli, 1925), #1; and Decembrio, *Vita Philippi Mariae III Ligurum ducis*, in *Opuscula historica*, #2. For the most comprehensive modern account of rise and fall of the republic, see Francesco Cognasso, "La Repubblica di San Ambrogio," in *Storia di Milano*, vol. 6: *Il ducato visconteo e la repubblica ambrosiana, 1392–1450* (Milan: Fondazione Treccani degli Alfieri, 1955), 387–448. See also Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 140–48. For fuller bibliography, see Diana Robin, *Filèlfo in Milan: Writings 1451–1477* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 85–104.

35. Monica Ferrari, *Per non mancare in tuto del debito mio: L'educazione dei bambini Sforza nel Quattrocento* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2000); Dario Cingolani, *Baldo Martorello da Serra de' Conti: Un umanista al servizio degli Sforza: Biografia con edizione delle lettere e della grammatica latina dal ms. trivulziano 786*. [Serra de' Conti]: Biblioteca Comunale, 1983; also Sandra Bernato, "Martorelli, Baldo," *DBI* 71 (2008):358–59 <[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/baldo-martorelli\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/baldo-martorelli_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/)>.

1454, Martorelli composed a Latin grammar text, his *Grammatica latina*,<sup>36</sup> for both children. At age eight, Ippolita wrote her first vernacular letter, addressed to her father (Letter 1: 13 July 1453). She signed the letter *manu propria* (written in my own hand), indicating nonetheless Martorelli's influence, since he would cosign many of her letters "Baldus M." Martorelli, who arrived in Milan in 1449, had received his own classical education from Vittorino da Feltre, who ran the celebrated palace school, the Casa Giosa, in Mantua at the court of Ludovico Gonzaga and his wife Barbara of Brandenburg.

Many noble families in fifteenth-century Italy conducted their correspondence with one another in Latin. Official documents and correspondence exchanged between courts were often in Latin; and so the sons and daughters of elite families were trained not only to write eloquently in Latin but to ornament their prose with passages from Virgil, Plautus, Ovid, and other authors in the Roman canon.<sup>37</sup> Ippolita's vernacular letters everywhere manifest her schooling in Latin eloquence. Her three extant Latin orations delivered publicly in 1455, 1459, and 1465 further demonstrate her education in the elements of classical rhetoric.<sup>38</sup> With the exception of one elegy in Latin that Ippolita wrote mourning her father's death in 1466, no poetry has been attributed to her:

Est socer ille meus Siculum rex gloria regum  
 Est meus hic coniunx alter spes Latii  
 Nil socer ipse magis nec coniunx deligit eque  
 Fratribus Ipolite nil genitrice magis  
 Hiis igitur sevim phar est lenire dolorem  
 Hiis propria sunt magno vota ferenda deo.<sup>39</sup>

Ippolita also acquired a teacher of Greek in the refugee scholar Constantine Lascaris, who had in 1458 received the prestigious chair of Greek in Milan.<sup>40</sup> He wrote a Greek grammar for her use, the *Erotemeta*, dedicating the work to her; it

36. Conserved in the Biblioteca Trivulziana in Milan, MS 786.

37. See, for example, Ippolita's *Wedding Oration for Tristano Sforza and Beatrice d'Este (1455)*, given below.

38. Ippolita's three extant orations in the original Latin and our English translations are given below.

39. Jane Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets. Language, Gender, and Authority from Antiquity to the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 172–73. Stevenson's translation reads: "My father-in-law is king and glory of the kingdom of Sicily,/ My husband is another hope for Latium,/ But neither my father-in-law himself, or my husband, please me more/ Than Ippolita's brothers, or her mother./ Therefore for these, there is a light to relieve severe grief./ For these are proper prayers to be uttered to almighty God." We have not been able to find any other citation of these verses.

40. On Lascaris and Ippolita Sforza see John Monfasani, "Lascaris, Constantine," in Paul F. Grendler, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Renaissance* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1999), 3.381–82. See also Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*, 172, and Castaldo, "Introduction," lxxv, on her relationship with Lascaris.

would be the first book published in Greek in Italy.<sup>41</sup> In 1465, he followed Ippolita and her nuptial train to Naples, obtaining that same year an appointment at the university of Naples. Galeazzo, meanwhile, left Martorelli to study with Guinforte Barzizza, the son of Gasparino Barzizza, the eminent professor of moral philosophy and rhetoric at the university of Pavia.

Even after he was made duke in 1450, Francesco Sforza found himself constantly at war. A respite from the battlefield came in April 1454, when Sforza concluded the Peace of Lodi with Venice and Florence, the papacy and Naples joining the resulting Italian League the following year. The agreement with King Alfonso I of Naples stipulated a double marriage alliance with Milan: the king's grandson Alfonso was to marry Ippolita Sforza, then ten years old, while his granddaughter Eleonora d'Aragona was to be betrothed to Sforza Maria Sforza.<sup>42</sup>

Ten years later, in May 1465, Ippolita's marriage to Alfonso was celebrated in Milan, with his brother Federico serving as his proxy. In June, Ippolita and her train of attendants left for Naples, stopping on the way in Florence, where they were the guests of the sixteen-year-old Lorenzo de' Medici who had represented his family at Ippolita's wedding in Milan.<sup>43</sup> Ippolita and her party were lavishly entertained at the houses of the merchant elite in Florence as well by Lorenzo and the Medici. In August, as the group continued on their journey to Naples, Francesco Sforza halted Ippolita's cortege for three weeks after hearing that his son-in-law Jacopo Piccinino had been murdered at Ferrante's castle in Naples where he had been a guest.

Once assured that his daughter would be not only safe from harm but graciously received in Naples, the duke allowed Ippolita and her attendants to continue their journey. They arrived in Naples on 14 September. On 10 October 1465, the nuptial ceremonies were celebrated in Naples and the festivities went on for days. On 27 December, Ippolita officially received the title duchess of Calabria. In her letters to her mother, Ippolita described the games she and Alfonso played and the books they read together. But already in mid-January, three months into the marriage, Ippolita had Alfonso followed when she learned that he was slipping away to visit former lovers, among whom were young men as well as women.<sup>44</sup> Angry and distraught, she complained bitterly to her mother, in spite of the fact that extramarital affairs were the rule among fifteenth-century noblemen. In any case, she had seen it all before with her own father and his

41. Monfasani, "Lascaris, Constantine."

42. See Carlo Canetta, "Le sponsalie di casa Sforza con casa d'Aragona," *Archivio storico lombardo* ser. 1, vol. 9, fasc. 1 (1882): 136–44, for the betrothal agreements.

43. Judith Bryce, "Performing for Strangers: Women, Dance, and Music in Quattrocento Florence," *Renaissance Quarterly* 4, no.1 (2001): 1074–1107.

44. Regarding the diplomats' correspondence on Ippolita's having Alfonso tailed see Welch, "Ippolita Maria Sforza," 128–29.