THE MAGNIFICENCE OF BORSO AND ERCOLE D'ESTE

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BORSO AND ERCOLE D'ESTE
PRINCES OF FERRARA
1450 - 1505

By

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the reigns of Borso and Ercole d'Este who ruled Ferrara consecutively from 1450-1504. During this period Ferrara became one of the leading courts of Italy and a prominent European cultural centre. This was largely the result of the rulers' display of "Magnificence", a classical concept which gained a new significance in the later fifteenth century. The Este used Magnificence to consolidate their dynasty and to fulfill personal political aspirations. Furthermore, they used it to emphasize class differences; such behaviour indicates the crystallization of an upper-class identity among the ruling élite of Italy. Ercole, in particular, emerges as an example of the self-assured, aristocratic ruler who appeared in the later *Quattrocento* Italian courts.

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INTRODUCTION

During the second half of the fifteenth century, Ferrara became the seat of one of the more prominent Italian courts and it achieved a reputation as a leading cultural centre.[1] This position was the outcome of the calculated policies of Borso and Ercole d'Este who ruled the state consecutively from 1450 to 1505. Both rulers consciously cultivated what has been termed "Magnificence". This concept, first discussed by Aristotle and later by Aquinas, Alberti and several of his contemporaries, involves large-scale expenditure and results in the physical realization and exemplification of the power and majesty of the man who displays it.[2] Magnificence had been manifested by sovereigns since ancient times, but in each era its exponents subtly altered its definition to adapt it to current political and social needs and developments. The deliberate and consistent exhibition of Magnificence by the Este princes indicates that the concept gained a renewed significance to members of the ruling class in the *Quattrocento*. They used it to serve their personal political designs and to fulfill the wants and expectations of their subjects. The Este and their contemporaries employed it to establish their authority, to gain respect from their peers, and to procure popular support from the masses. It was an invaluable tool in the consolidation of the Este dynasty and it secured fame for

the family as a whole and for the individuals who displayed it.

Earlier Este *Marchesi* had encouraged the arts and learning in Ferrara, but it was not until the later 1400's that the brilliance and splendor of the city seriously rivaled that of the illustrious courts of Milan, Naples and papal Rome. The family, which had governed Ferrara since the late thirteenth century, was one of the oldest north of Florence and east of Milan. It had a strong tradition of service to the Holy Roman Emperor and also recognized papal sovereignity. Alberto d'Este founded a university at Ferrara in 1391 and he built the family *palazzo* and a number of *delizie* (villas), exemplifying the family's early interest in patronage and cultural advancement. His successor, Niccolò III, dubbed the *pater patriae* of Ferrara, continued and added to the work initiated by his father, particularly in the realms of architecture and civic improvement. His son, Leonello, an introverted and bookish ruler, transformed the court into a focus of linguistic and philological studies; but its renown waned quickly following his death.[3] It was only during Borso's extended reign that the visual arts and culture in general began to flourish noticeably in this northern Italian city.

For Borso, Magnificence was a crucial means of strengthening his hegemony in Ferrara. A bastard son of Niccolò III, he rose to the *Marchesate* despite the stronger legal claims to this position, by legitimate heirs. He resorted to substantial public expenditure, in part, to win

popular approval of his regime and to impress those influential contemporaries who could bestow upon him more power and prestige. His commissions and projects tended to emulate those of his father in an attempt to mask his own illegitimacy; but ultimately he conquered this obsession and he aimed his Magnificence towards the satisfaction of personal ambitions.

Magnificence served a different function for Ercole, who governed Ferrara with considerably more confidence than had Borso. He possessed more authority and status than any of his predecessors and, consequently, he utilized Magnificence to increase the dignity and nobility of his office. The magnitude of Magnificence reached new dimensions as he expended enormous sums and initiated far grander schemes than any previous Este ruler. Although his lavish endeavours were interrupted by a war, he continued to display Magnificence in an extravagant manner and in creative forms. Thus, while he ruled, Ferrara was hailed as a cultural vanguard throughout Europe.

The Magnificence of Borso and Ercole d'Este reflected yet another development in later fifteenth-century Italy - the crystallization of an upper-class identity.[4] This subtle and gradual process is illustrated by the increasing confidence, sophistication and formality exhibited in the behaviour and types of commissions of the Este rulers. Whereas Borso's Magnificence was restrained because of his illegitimacy, Ercole distinctly exploited it in order to emphasize the social and

cultural gap between the upper and lower echelons of society. Through it he created a truly majestic image of himself and he clearly elevated the interests of the nobility. Nonetheless, his subjects frequently benefited from his extravagant manifestations of Magnificence and he thereby maintained their admiration and loyalty.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Lewis Lockwood, "Music at Ferrara in the Period of Ercole I D'Este," *Studi Musicali*, I (1972), p. 101.

[2]Werner L. Gundersheimer, *Ferrara: The Style of a Renaissance Despotism* (Princeton, 1973), p. 267.

[3]See Gundersheimer for a comprehensive study of the history of the Este family.

[4]See Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City States in Renaissance Italy* (New York, 1979), pp. 218-276.

CHAPTER I

MAGNIFICENCE

The term "Magnificent" first appeared in ancient Greece and, subsequently, was applied to such diverse rulers as the Roman emperors, the medieval European monarchs and later to the despots of fifteenth-century Italy.[1] Its meaning in the *Quattrocento* was different from that of earlier times. Over the years, changing political and social circumstances led to a modified interpretation of the concept. Furthermore, its significance to society fluctuated - it was an essential element of the patronage of the Roman emperors but was of subordinate importance to medieval kings. In Renaissance Italy it acquired renewed importance to the ruling stratum of society. Princes and wealthy citizens adopted the traditions established by eminent patrons of the past and employed Magnificence in a manner suiting their situations.

Aristotle provides a starting point for any understanding of Magnificence. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he undertook an inquiry into the promotion and maintenance of human happiness. He contends that all deliberate human action aims at some purpose or good. The ultimate goal of human activity is happiness and to achieve it man must exercise the virtues of intellect and character.[2] Magnificence is one virtue of

character, that which deals with wealth and expenditure. It involves tasteful spending on a large scale. The man who expends considerable sums of money should be selective. He should determine suitable objects or functions upon which to spend his money.[3]

Aristotle provides some guidelines for the virtuous patron and the types capable of Magnificence. Only those who possess sufficient financial resources can display the virtue. This includes men who have accumulated wealth through their own efforts, those who have inherited fortunes from ancestors or obtained money from connections or those who are of high birth or reputation.[4] In other words, Magnificence is a virtue confined to the affluent. It should never be excessive, for then one is not behaving in order to be honourable, but, instead, to flaunt one's wealth.[5] On the other hand, cost is not a concern, for conscious calculation implies miserliness, not Magnificence. According to Aristotle, there are three categories of projects upon which a virtuous patron should bestow his riches. The first includes votive offerings and buildings, religious sacrifices and any other object or ceremony related to religious worship. The second encompasses weddings, the greeting and entertainment of foreign guests and anything else which may interest a whole city or the people of position within it.[6] He emphasizes that substantial expenditure for private occasions should be restricted to single, limited affairs. The third involves expenditure on private

needs, such as the furnishing of one's dwelling. A house reflects the owner's position in society and should be decorated accordingly. Aristotle concludes his remarks on the subject with the reminder that Magnificence does not embrace self-indulgent enterprises, but rather expenditure on public objects or structures which, ideally, are permanent (a temple, for example).[7]

A few of Aristotle's dictums, especially those dealing with religious and public patronage, were heeded by patrons such as Augustus, Constantine and Charlemagne. The support of popular religion and public interests remained a crucial concern of pagan and Christian patrons alike. These rulers also followed the practice of impressing their subjects and visiting dignitaries with lavish exhibitions of expenditure, although they often revelled in pomp and ostentation. Aristotle held, after all, that Magnificence should foster pride among a populace - it should not be abused by pretentious patrons. There were certain implications of his conception of Magnificence which were noted by these same sovereigns. First of all, since only the wealthy were capable of exercising the virtue, he elevated those who could patronize profusely above the masses. Thus, the philosopher provided an incentive for expending large sums to those patrons desiring to assert their political authority and social status. In his recommendation that patrons commission durable works or edifices, Augustus, Charlemagne and other reputable patrons found a

justification for cultivating their own fame, for a building or monument served as an enduring testimony of their Magnificence. Aristotle maintained that the manifestation of moral excellence was the most valuable consequence of Magnificence and renown was merely an inadvertent result. But for others the achievement of immortality became a prime motivation for developing it.

Among the most notable examples of Magnificence was that of Augustus. His reign witnessed a glaring concentration of wealth in private hands and his own family was extremely affluent. He adopted an ambitious spending program which realized several Aristotelian precepts of Magnificence. For example, he provided the funds for numerous temples such as those of Apollo on the Palatine and of Jupiter on the Capitoline and he restored and splendidly decorated a multitude of shrines. This religious expenditure was accompanied by extensive public patronage. He rebuilt the Flaminian Way, cleared and widened the Tiber River and refurbished the channels of the aqueducts.[8] These efforts promoted religious worship, stimulated civic pride and the success of his building scheme encouraged his successors to patronize architecture on a grand scale.

Augustus' patronage encompassed other realms including that of public amusement. By sponsoring gladitorial games, displays of athletes and hunts of beasts,[9] he satisfied a significant proportion of his subjects and, therefore,

fulfilled another Aristotelian dictum. Aristotle had not commented directly upon the topic of public entertainment, but then he could not indicate every object or activity deserving of substantial expenditure. It was not his purpose to establish definitive instructions to patrons. The patron's course of action, dependent on varying factors such as the times, the circumstances and the personality of the patron, could only be determined by his intuitive impulses.[10] In Augustus' case, he decided that pleasing a significant percentage of the Roman population with games and other diversions was worthy of his financial attention; but, generally speaking, the adaptable nature of Magnificence was a notion appreciated by patrons in all ages.

Augustus recognized the opportunity to attain fame and immortality through extensive commissions. The countless buildings which bore his name, his statues and the coins and medals which carried his portrait, all acted to convey an image of his splendor and Magnificence to contemporaries and to posterity. Moreover, this 'cult of the emperor' was part of a calculated policy to ensure the loyalty of his subjects and the smooth operation of his government. In other words, the propagation of a virtuous and authoritative image of the Emperor, by means of lavish patronage, was used to re-establish a stable and ordered society.[11] Subsequently, it became standard practice among European sovereigns to manipulate Magnificence for the purpose of fulfilling their political

ambitions.

The concept of Magnificence, with its implications of ostentation, celebrity and political control found opposition among forces in the ancient world even before it encountered a strong Christian ethic. Stoicism, which was popular among the aristocratic and educated sectors of society, conceived of wealth as worthless. Affluence encouraged lust for new valuables and fear of losing possessions. Eventually, Christianity adopted this classical stoic notion and united it with a pronounced emphasis on spirituality. Salvation of the soul was the ultimate goal of the Christian. Those who embraced the religion advocated asceticism and attacked pagan hedonism.[12] Augustine proclaimed the superiority of the 'City of God', the community of those who loved God and would find their home in heaven, over the 'City of the World', the society of those whose minds and hearts were set on worldly things.[13] Christianity dealt a heavy blow to Magnificence, for a virtue concerned with wealth and expenditure had no value in a world which exalted austerity.

The concept managed to survive in European society primarily because patrons like the Emperor Constantine adapted it to Christian ways. He had ascended to the imperial throne believing that he had a twofold mission of saving the empire and promoting Christianity. He conceived of these aims as inseparable - a strong church would serve as a backbone to a healthy empire. His patronage reflected this design. He was

a prolific builder of Christian churches including those of Holy Peace, of Holy Wisdom and of the Apostles. For the empire he constructed a forum, baths, a racetrack (all at Trèves) and the grandiose city of Constantinople.[14] Constantine's patronage of religious structures and public buildings had a parallel in the Augustan pursuit of Magnificence. His quest for glory and immortality was all too evident in the Arch of Constantine in Rome and in other monuments. Furthermore, he attempted to reunite and stabilize a disintegrating empire through costly expenditure like that involved in the raising of a new capital at Constantinople.[15]

There was a distinct difference, however, between the Magnificence of Augustus and that of Constantine, especially in terms of their ultimate goals. Augustus' utmost concern was the Empire. The welfare of the Roman state was crucial to Constantine as well, but the salvation of his soul and the glorification of God were his absolute priorities. All his patronage was intended to please the supreme being. He demonstrated to his contemporaries that Magnificence could be used unselfishly and generously to satisfy God and to encourage the expansion of the Christian religion. The virtue was shown to be compatible with Christianity.

The barbarian invasions, the closing off of the Mediterranean by the Moslems and the ensuing loss of foreign markets had a severe effect upon the European economy. The financial resources available to rulers like Charlemagne were

considerably reduced, as was the scale of Magnificence displayed by them.[16] Einhard, Charlemagne's biographer, tells us that he "undertook very many works calculated to adorn and benefit his kingdom,";[17] among them were the basilica of the Holy Mother of God (at Aix-la-Chapelle), a bridge over the Rhine, two splendid palaces, and he repaired many churches which had deteriorated. He also patronized a group of scholars whose function was to create a sense of grandeur at the Carolingian court. The king's financial disbursals were paltry in comparison to those of Augustus or Constantine, but then Charlemagne did not have as much wealth at his disposal as his predecessors. He relied on the produce of the royal estates and on the resources of the church to support his patronage.[18] The extent of a patron's expenditures were subject to his current economic circumstances. Although Charlemagne's patronage could not equal that of Augustus, he nevertheless cultivated an aura of Magnificence, for no single contemporary could surpass him in these activities.

Certain manifestations of Magnificence, particularly the obvious display of wealth, still troubled churchmen. Aquinas, in his general rethinking of Aristotelianism, addressed the issue. He considers Magnificence a Christian virtue for it involves performing good works, charity, generosity and the glorification of God. The most honourable type of expenditure is that which is directed towards religion (building a church, for example), for it directly reflects

upon the honour of God and thereby accomplishes a holy deed.[19] Expenditure on worldly matters, such as occasional celebrations or preparing a dwelling, is valuable as well for it entails the act of giving and the denial of love of money. Still, "the magnificent man does not chiefly concentrate on lavish personal expenditure ... because this is not a really great aim."[20]

Aquinas disagreed with the Aristotelian dictum that only a wealthy man was capable of Magnificence. He contends that the intention of being magnificent is important. There is worth in the "spirit's effort to create great things."[21] A poor man can exhibit Magnificence by undertaking a task which requires little expenditure, but which in relation to his financial situation demands a sacrifice. In other words, the scale is relative to the resources of the patron.

His view lent respect to the cult of the poor man (as popularized by movements such as Franciscanism), for it acknowledged the ascetic man's ability to exercise Magnificence. On the whole, however, the term Magnificent continued to be applied to the extravagant expenditure of the powerful and the wealthy. Aquinas' evaluation did encourage Christian rulers to expend substantial sums on patronage for it implied that doing so was far more admirable than hoarding money. His assertion that religious patronage was a means of glorifying God elevated this type of expenditure to a new prominence. Many Christian patrons, such as Charles IV of Bohemia, saw in it a

method of securing their salvation, and expenditure on religious worship and structures comprised a large proportion of their total patronage.[22]

Despite Aquinas' justification of Magnificence, certain intellectual currents hindered its popular acceptance. The brand of Humanism which flourished in late *Trecento* Italy was one such force. Its exponents were teachers or secretaries who travelled from court to court, scarcely earning a living. "They found the sole justification for their existence in the ideal of the wise man's independence of social position and material possessions."[23] Consequently, Guarino da Verona and other ascetic humanists propagated a negative view of prosperity.

This humanist renunciation of worldly goods, however, shortly began to lose its appeal as parts of Italy became increasingly commercialized. Petrarch's writings exemplify the process by which humanists themselves began to reject the ascetic ideal. When voluntarily confined to secluded surroundings in the Vaucluse Valley or in the rural outskirts of Parma, Petrarch wrote of his contempt for external possessions. But once plunged into the bustling lifestyle of the Italian cities, his works and letters indicate that he easily succumbed to the wealth and comfort they offered.[24] In his later years, he openly admitted that if forced to choose between poverty and affluence, he would select the latter; ultimately he decided that '*mediocritas*', or a moderate standard of living, was the ideal means of existence.[25]

Petrach's experience exemplified the fate of the whole of Humanism. As the urban centres became the new foci of intellectual activity, "the ancient cry of *paupertas* was drowned both in Florence and in Venice by the voices of citizens who were at home in the world of active life and earthly goods."[26] Leonardo Bruni, the Florentine chancellor, reasserted the Aristotelian tenet of the moral value of wealth (the notion that riches provide the opportunity for the exercise of virtue) and later Stefano Porcari, the Florentine Capitano del Popolo, publicly proclaimed the benefits of affluence. This positive attitude towards wealth was echoed even in funeral orations - the deceased were praised for their acquisition of riches.[27]

The increase in commerce and finance, the acceptance of the idea of usury, the rise of merchant and banking interests and a general accumulation of wealth all combined to give respectability to this conception of prosperity and to instigate a new discussion of Magnificence in mid-*Quattrocento* Italy. Francesco Filelfo's *Convivia Mediolanensia*, written in 1443, upheld the Aristotelian understanding of Magnificence, particularly the idea that it is a virtue limited to the wealthy. Filelfo notes that whoever desires to appear dignified and civilized should expend considerable sums on those situations listed by Aristotle (weddings, entertainment of dignitaries and the like).[28] He does not refer to the matter of architectural patronage but another humanist,

Alberti was to popularize the idea that architecture is "the way of spending, and patronage."[29] In the preface of his treatise on architecture, he states:

> Men of publick Spirits approve and rejoice when you have raised a fine Wall or Portico, and adorned it with Portals, Columns, and a handsome Roof, knowing you have thereby not only served yourself, but them too, having by this generous Use of your Wealth, gained an Addition of great Honour to yourself, your Family, your Descendants and your City.[30]

He notes that architecture serves a substantial number of people and it earns an honourable reputation for the patron. In an earlier work, he advised that "if fortune gives you wealth, use it so that it will bring honour and fame to you ..."[31] The obvious implication of these remarks is that fame is an appropriate and desireable goal of large-scale patronage.

The views of Filelfo and Alberti can be contrasted with those of Timoteo Maffei, an Augustinian monk who was an advocate of the Aquinian notion of Magnificence. In a tract which defends Cosimo de' Medici's decision to rebuild, at a considerable personal expense, the church and monastery of the Badia at Fiesole, Maffei wrote:

> from Cosimo's Magnificence in building monasteries and temples it will have had divine excellence before its eyes, and it will consider how much piety and with how much thankfulness we are indebted to God....[32]

The author indicates that Cosimo's patronage reflects God's honour and demonstrates His benevolence. In another passage, Maffei claims that Cosimo's buildings serve as an encouragement

to others to patronize religious works.[33] Overall, Maffei stresses the priority of religious patronage and the glorification of God as the aim of displaying Magnificence.

The later *Quattrocento* understanding of Magnificence took into consideration the theoretical discourses of the mid-century as well as the practices of men who had recently achieved reputations for Magnificence, such as the Duke of Berry or Philip the Bold of Burgundy. The courts of France had their greatest influence on the ruling families of Northern Italy. For example, the Este, whose dynastic mythology held that they were settlers from Carolingian France, felt a special affinity for the French and they closely observed their behaviour.[34] The patronage of these families found a parallel in that of the Duke of Berry and of his brothers. The Duke was an avid book collector and he assembled a library containing over three hundred volumes, many of which were chivalric romances.[35] He personally commissioned many of these works and his most exquisite treasure was an illustrated Book of Hours, *Les Très Riches Heures*.[36] The establishment of libraries became customary practice among the rulers of Italian states and these despots often competed with each other for the possession of highly-prized volumes.[37] The Duke's brother, Philip the Bold, and other French aristocrats habitually patronized the Carthusian Order. This activity became popular among the Italian élite as well, a fact illustrated by the founding of Carthusian

monasteries in Ferrara and Mantua in the latter half of the fifteenth century.[38] Finally, the political maneuvering of these French patrons could not have escaped the notice of their Italian counterparts. By creating splendid courts, Philip and the Duke of Berry successfully consolidated their realms and ended their dependence on the royal Valois court.[39] This example could have stimulated those Italians who possessed similar political ambitions to patronize on a grand scale.

In Italy, Cosimo de' Medici ended some traditional conventions of patronage which previously had restricted individual initiative in this sphere of activity. The Duke of Berry and other Frenchmen had been ambitious builders, while on the Italian peninsula, churches and guilds monopolized architectural patronage. Here the rich had been limited to the construction of additions to existing churches and family *palazzi*. Cosimo, however, embarked on major building projects, the first of which was the convent of San Marco (begun in 1437). Subsequently, he financed the churches of SS. Anunziata, S. Croce, S. Lorenzo, the Badia at Fiesole, palaces in Florence and Milan, a villa at Careggi, and the library of S. Giorgio at Venice.[40] His patronage of architecture was extraordinarily extensive and it inspired other Italian patrons to follow suit.

Cosimo was not modest about his commissions, as indicated by the presence of his coat of arms or *imprese*

(personal devices or symbols) on them.[41] For example, the family crest or emblem may be found on most of his ecclesiastical foundations including the Badia at Fiesole.[42] Many of his contemporaries disapproved of this type of self-glorification and, consequently, he occasionally restrained his show of Magnificence;[43] but the pursuit of fame through patronage grew increasingly acceptable during the *Quattrocento*. By the end of the century, the custom of applying one's *imprese* or heraldry to one's commissions, and thereby associating the patron to his works, became commonplace.

Cosimo also earned renown for his frequent patronage of public festivals. He organized various spectacles and activities in celebration of special occasions (such as religious holidays) and in honour of distinguished guests. When Galeazzo Sforza of Milan met Pope Pius II in Florence in 1459, eight days of splendid festivities followed. Events included a tournament in the Piazza S. Croce, an open-air ball in the Mercato Nuovo, a chase of wild beasts in the piazza of the Signoria, and a stately procession in which the great families of the city participated.[44] This festival was only one of many held by Cosimo throughout his career and it served to increase his popularity among the masses. They truly enjoyed spectacles and, thus, appreciated the Medici patriarch's lavish entertainment.[45] His peers were also impressed by these affairs and public fêtes became an important vehicle for the display of Magnificence by the end of the century.

Cosimo instigated still another trend in Italy in the area of academic patronage. He displayed a sincere passion for learning and his expenditures reflected this. He established an impressive library and he put it at the disposal of the numerous humanists whom he patronized. Reputable scholars like Niccolò Niccoli and Marsiglio Ficino earned a comfortable living in his service.[46] Other rulers, among them Leonello d'Este and Federigo da Montefeltro, followed this example and soon one could not be considered "a great prince in mid-*Quattrocento* Italy without having a squadron of humanists."[47] This type of patronage also served a political purpose. Cosimo's overwhelming contribution to the current aesthetic and literary movements in Florence placed him at the head of the city's society - a position from which he could extend considerable political influence.[48] In other words, he used Magnificence to attain and maintain a powerful hold over the Florentine state.

Many contemporary Italian rulers also recognized the political utility of Magnificence. Federigo da Montefeltro was such a prince. His half-brother, Oddantonio, had succeeded their father to the small Appenine territory of Urbino while Federigo, having been born a bastard, seemed destined to the "traditionally subordinate life of the poor, illegitimate relation."[49] Oddantonio had not ruled long before he was assassinated during an uprising and the popular Federigo assumed the title of Count of Urbino. He had already

proved himself to be a shrewd and able *condottiere* and as his victories continued to multiply, his income grew exorbitantly. His profession demanded his frequent absence from Urbino and because of this and the questionable basis of his authority (he was, after all, illegitimate and had ascended to power unconventionally) he feared that a discontented populace could jeopardize his political security.[50] He eventually responded to this dilemma by launching a grandiose program of patronage. For example, in the 1460s he procured the celebrated architect, Luciano Laurana, to embellish the city and rebuild the palace.[51] Within a few years the Count initiated another ambitious project, "to create the finest library since ancient times."[52] He also maintained a splendid court, consisting of approximately five hundred nobles and servants. The size of this entourage was extraordinary considering that the total population of Urbino was less than 5,000.[53]

Federigo's patronage earned him the loyalty of his subjects. The flourishing arts and the enhanced city gave the citizens a sense of pride in their ruler and state.[54] Furthermore, it created full employment in Urbino. As one contemporary noted, "all his subjects were well-to-do and waxed rich through labour at the works he had instituted and a beggar was never seen."[55] But besides quashing the possibility of the Count's deposition, Federigo's Magnificence served another purpose. For some time he had aspired to the more prestigious and powerful position of Duke and he used patronage

as a means of impressing both the Pope and the secular rulers of Italy and of other parts of Europe.[56] His consistent demonstration of Magnificence combined with his outstanding military record secured for him the title of Duke of Urbino in 1474.

Federigo governed the newly created duchy for eight more years and this period witnessed an even grander scale of patronage than before. He decorated his palaces with paintings, sculpture and intarsia and the voices of the musicians whom he patronized filled their halls. He built new churches and refurbished old ones and he summoned the architect Francesco di Giorgio to design and construct the most advanced fortifications for the city.[57] Admiration of the Duke was widespread and his commissions convinced others that he was a man of exceptional taste. Contemporaries even copied such works as the carved grotesques in the Urbino palace, the portraits of famous men in his *studiolo* and other of his pieces of art.[58] His patronage, therefore, influenced prevailing tastes and initiated new vogues. Aristotle had emphasized the significance of taste to the concept of Magnificence and this relationship resurfaced in the fifteenth-century understanding of it. To be considered truly magnificent, a patron like Federigo had to exercise tasteful judgement when assigning commissions and was expected to encourage new trends.

Federigo's court was one of many with which Borso and Ercole d'Este maintained contact. They often sent members of the family or trusted advisers to the courts of Milan, Mantua, Naples, Burgundy and others and they, in turn, reported back to Ferrara the activities of the ruling families of these cities.[59] Such accounts often included descriptions of the most recent endeavours patronized by the various governing princes. The Este, the Sforza, the Medici and others were very competitive in the realm of patronage and they regularly attempted to match or exceed each others' commissions. It was hardly surprising that the establishment of a family library, the commissioning of illuminated manuscripts, the promotion of the Carthusian Order, the sponsorship of festivals, the application of coats of arms and *imprese* to buildings and artistic objects were all featured in the patronage of Borso and Ercole as well as in that of several other *Quattrocento* patrons. Occasionally, works of art indicate direct interaction between some of the courts. For instance, the Duke of Berry's *Très Riches Heures* and Borso's Schifanoia frescoes bear similarities in composition which cannot be attributed to coincidence - either Borso or his artists were familiar with the illustrated Book of Hours.[60]

The patronage of contemporaries was not the sole influence on the Este. The reputation of historical figures may have encouraged them to exercise Magnificence. Borso's obsession with his family's apparent French heritage suggests

that he was familiar with Charlemagne's exploits. He may have read some of the books about Charlemagne which are listed in the inventory of the holdings in his library.[61] Ercole was an enthusiastic reader of historical works and his knowledge of such celebrated patrons as Augustus probably surpassed that of Borso.[62] Ercole, who also delighted in philosophical books, may have come across the Aristotelian and Aquinian discussions of Magnificence.[63] Borso, whose knowledge of Latin was minimal, was less likely to have waded through the *Nicomachean Ethics* or the *Summa Theologiae*. He preferred chivalric romances above all other works.[64] Nonetheless, both he and Ercole would have been aware of their conceptions through the contemporary understanding of Magnificence.

The Aristotelian dictum that only the wealthy were capable of exercising it prevailed and Aristotle's list of occasions and types of works worthy of considerable expenditure remained a guideline for patrons such as the Este. Aquinas' notions that Magnificence reflects God's splendor and that religious patronage is the most honourable type of expenditure continued to be popular as indicated by the religious orientation of a significant portion of the patronage of the Este and of other Italian princes. Contemporary views on patronage mingled with those of Aristotle and Aquinas. For example, the Albertian insistence on the primacy of architectural patronage and of the patron's pursuit of fame and immortality were commonly accepted notions. A copy of Alberti's

treatise on architecture, which propagated such ideas, was borrowed from Lorenzo de'Medici by Ercole before he proceeded to renovate his palace.[65]

The current conception of Magnificence and the practices of political rivals had a more direct impact on the course of Este patronage than did the writings of Aristotle or Aquinas. But Borso and Ercole were also motivated by political insecurity, personal ambition, expectations of subjects and fellow rulers, military upheavals and other immediate considerations. The traditional use of Magnificence and the contemporary acceptance of it provided them with a means of responding to the precarious circumstances afflicting later fifteenth-century Ferrara.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Few studies have examined Magnificence in the period between the reign of Augustus and the fifteenth century. See A.D. Fraser Jenkins, "Cosimo de Medici's patronage of architecture and the theory of Magnificence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXIII (1970), pp. 162-170 and Morris Bishop, "The Duty of the Prince is Magnificence," *Horizon*, XII (1970), pp. 54-79. Even these articles deal primarily with the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. For studies of Magnificence after the fifteenth century, see: A.G. Dickens, Ed. *The Courts of Europe: Politics, Patronage and Royalty 1400-1800* (London, 1977); Michael Levey, *Painting at Court* (New York, 1971); and Roy Strong, *Splendour at Court: Renaissance Spectacle and Illusion* (London, 1973).

[2]J.D. Allan, *The Philosophy of Aristotle* (London, 1970), pp. 123-126. Virtues of intellect refer to theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom. Other virtues of character include bravery, liberality, justice, temperance and others.

[3]Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, W.D. Ross, Ed. (London, 1915), p. 1122a.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 1122b.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 1123a.

[6]*Ibid.*, p. 1122b.

[7]*Ibid.*

[8]C. Suetonius Tranquillus, *Divi Augusti Vita*, Michael Adams, Ed. (London, 1959), pp. 19-21 and Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, P.A. Brunt and J.M. Moore, Eds. (Oxford, 1967), pp. 26-30.

[9]Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, pp. 28-30.

[10]Allan, *Philosophy of Aristotle*, p. 125.

[11]Donald Earl, *The Age of Augustus* (London, 1968), pp. 166-167.

[12]Hans Baron, "Franciscan Poverty and Civic Wealth as

Factors in the Rise of Humanistic Thought," *Speculum*, XIII (1938), p. 5.

[13]St. Augustine, *City of God*, Forward by Etienne Gilson (Garden City, 1958), p. 38.

[14]Ramsay MacMullen, *Constantine* (London, 1970), pp. 49-51, 154, 235. He notes that Constantine "would have been no ruler of his times if he had not, like Diocletian in Nicomedia, Galerius in Thessalonica, and Maxentius in Rome, constructed a splendid racetrack and stands," (p. 52). Evidently, public entertainment was still a popular outlet for displaying one's Magnificence.

[15]*Ibid.*, p. 232.

[16]Henri Pirenne, *Medieval Cities: Their Origins and the Revival of Trade* (Princeton, 1974), pp. 26-41.

[17]Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne* (Ann Arbor, 1960), p. 43.

[18]Pirenne, *Medieval Cities*, pp. 40-41. He adds that "[t]he resources of the sovereign [Charlemagne] consisted only in the revenue from his demesnes, in the tributes levied on conquered tribes and in the booty got by war. The market-tolls no longer contributed to the replenishment of the treasury, thus attesting to the commercial decline of the period." (pp. 40-41).

[19]St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, XXXXII (New York, 1963), p. 175.

[20]*Ibid.*, p. 171.

[21]*Ibid.*, pp. 175, 179.

[22]Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor from 1346 to 1378, created a splendid court at Prague and the greater portion of his patronage was religious in nature. See Levey, *Painting at Court*, pp. 24-27, 42.

[23]Baron, "Franciscan Poverty," p. 12.

[24]*Ibid.*, pp. 6-11 and Francesco Petrarch, *Letters*, Morris Bishop, Ed. (Bloomington, 1966), pp. 69, 175-176. The first

letter was sent from Parma to Luca Cristiani and is dated May 18, 1349. The second letter, from Milan was sent to Francesco Melli and dated December 7, 1359.

[25]Petrarch, *Letters*, pp. 286-288. Letter to Matteo Longo, Archdeacon of Liége from Arquà, dated January 6, 1371.

[26]Baron, "Franciscan Poverty," p. 18.

[27]*Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

[28]Jenkins, "Cosimo de'Medici's patronage," pp. 166-167.

[29]Cecil H. Clough, "Federigo da Montefeltro's Patronage of the Arts, 1468-1482," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXXVI (1973), p. 140.

[30]Leon Battista Alberti, *Ten Books on Architecture*, Leoni James, Trans. (London, 1955), p. x.

[31]Leon Battista Alberti, *The Alberti's of Florence: Leon Battista Alberti's Della Famiglia*, Guido A. Guarino, Trans. (Lewisburg, Pa., 1971), p. 147.

[32]Timoteo Maffei, *In magnificentiae Cosmi Medicei Florentini detractores* in Jenkins, "Cosimo de'Medici's patronage," p. 166.

[33]Jenkins, "Cosimo de'Medici's patronage," p. 166.

[34]Gundersheimer, *Style of a* Despotism, p. 19.

[35]Millard Meiss, *French Painting in the Time of Jean de Berry* (Text) (London, 1969), pp. 287-308.

[36]See Jean Porcher, *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc De Berry* (Paris, 1950). A Book of Hours is "a prayer book, a companion for the pious during church services, an aid to private devotions." Bishop, "The Duty of the Prince," p. 59.

[37]Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Renaissance Princes, Popes and Prelates* (New York, 1963), pp. 102, 213-222.

[38]Charles M. Rosenberg, "'Per il bene di...nostra cipta': Borso d'Este and the Certosa of Ferrara," *Renaissance Quarterly*, XXIX (1976), pp. 330-331.

[39]C.A.J. Armstrong, "Dukes that Outdid Kings," in Dickens, *Courts of Europe*, p. 57.

[40]Jenkins, "Cosimo de Medici's patronage," p. 164.

[41]*Imprese*, a sort of bastard heraldry, became very popular particularly among the Italians of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These often obscure devices decorated art, books, coins, buildings and other objects. See George Hill and Graham Pollard, *Medals of the Renaissance* (London, 1978), pp. 16-17 and the sixteenth-century work by Paolo Giovio, *Dialogo Dell'Imprese Militari e Amorose*, Maria L. Doglio, Ed. (Rome, 1978).

[42]E.H. Gombrich, "The Early Medici as Patrons of Art: A Survey of Primary Sources," in E.F. Jacob, Ed., *Italian Renaissance Studies* (London, 1960), p. 282.

[43]*Ibid.*, p. 292. In one instance, Cosimo rejected Brunelleschi's design for a new palace because he felt it was too ostentatious.

[44]Dorothea K. Ewart, *Cosimo de'Medici* (New York), 1970, p. 193.

[45]*Ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

[46]*Ibid.*, pp. 218-220, 228 and Vespasiano, *Renaissance Princes*, pp. 213-222.

[47]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 163.

[48]Ewart, *Cosimo de'Medici*, p. 215, and Vespasiano, *Renaissance Princes*, pp. 217, 223.

[49]Denis Mack Smith, "Federigo da Montefeltro," in J.H. Plumb, Ed., *Penguin Book of the Renaissance* (Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 281.

[50]*Ibid.*, p. 282.

[51]Clough, "Federigo da Montefeltro's Patronage," p. 138.

[52]Vespasiano, *Renaissance Princes*, p. 102.

[53]Smith, "Federigo da Montefeltro," p. 292, and Peter Burke, *Tradition and Innovation in Renaissance Italy* (London, 1974), p. 52.

[54]Clough, "Federigo da Montefeltro's Patronage," p. 144.

[55]Vespasiano, *Renaissance Princes*, p. 108.

[56]One such foreign country was England from which Federigo received the Order of the Garter.

[57]Clough, "Federigo da Montefeltro's Patronage," pp. 138-139. For a detailed analysis of Federigo's superbly decorated private study see Cecil H. Clough, "Federigo da Montefeltro's Private Study in his ducal palace of Gubbio," *Apollo*, LXXXVI (1967), pp. 278-287.

[58]Clough, "Federigo da Montefeltro's Patronage," p. 143.

[59]For example, Francesco d'Este (Leonello's natural son) stayed at the Burgundian court from 1444-1475 and in 1494, Ercole's son, Ferrante, was part of the entourage of Charles VIII of France. Armstrong, "Dukes that Outdid Kings," p. 74, and Lockwood, "Music at Ferrara," p. 115.

[60]Charles M. Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara During the Reign of Borso D'Este (1450-1471): A Study of Court Patronage* (Ann Arbor, 1974), p. 201.

[61]Giulio Bertoni, *La Biblioteca e la coltura ai tempi del Duca Ercole I (1471-1505)* (Turin, 1903), p. 214.

[62]Werner L. Gundersheimer, "The patronage of Ercole I d'Este," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, VI (1976), p. 15.

[63]The works of Aristotle and Aquinas were available in the Este library. Bertoni, *La Biblioteca*, pp. 215-220.

[64]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 22.

[65]Burke, *Tradition and Innovation*, p. 124.

CHAPTER II

THE MAGNIFICENCE OF BORSO D'ESTE 1450-1471

Rulers of various *Quattrocento* city-states, including Milan, Urbino, Mantua and Ferrara struggled to surpass the opulence and splendor of the courts of their respective rivals. Competitive instincts alone did not incite these princes to expend enormous sums of money on the arts and festivities; political expediency frequently motivated them to cultivate Magnificence. Such was the case with Borso d'Este who ruled Ferrara between 1450 and 1471.[1] He had always been intrigued with the brilliance of neighbouring courts in Italy and France and, when he ascended to the position of *Marchese* of Ferrara, he too indulged in a notable display of Magnificence. His expenditures were hardly arbitrary, for as a bastard who assumed power in the presence of legitimate heirs, he began to sponsor lavish public works as a means of extending his popular support. As his reign progressed he grew increasingly confident and this was reflected in his Magnificence. Following his investiture as Duke of Modena and Reggio in 1452, his expenditures included more semi-private commissions intended to impress a sophisticated and influential element of society - an element which could satisfy his political ambitions.[2] But Borso could never quite escape the fact of

his illegitimacy. He attempted to strengthen his claim to the *Marchesate* by maintaining a clear continuity between his own reign and that of his predecessors, particularly that of his father, Niccolò III. Thus he consistently followed the pattern of patronage established by previous Este rulers.[3] Only towards the very end of his life did he break with Este conventions and did his Magnificence reflect the sense of self-assurance characteristic of the later fifteenth-century political élite.

Borso did not possess the strongest title to the *Marchesate* and his position was consequently insecure for some time. He was the third illegitimate son of Niccolò III d'Este and a Sienese noblëwoman named Stella dell'Assassino. His eldest brother, Ugo, had been executed for his involvement in a scandalous affair with his father's wife, Parisina.[4] Niccolò's second son, Leonello (who was legitimated shortly following Ugo's death) became the favoured heir. Borso, on the other hand, was treated rather indifferently by his father, receiving a barely adequate education (he was tutored by the undistinguished humanists Giacomo Bisi and Guglielmo Capello) and being provided with meagre resources upon which to live. In one instance, at a time when plague threatened Ferrara, he was sent away only with the barest of provisions.[5] His military career also showed little indication that he might someday govern Ferrara. At the age of eighteen, he enlisted with the Venetian forces in 1431 and his ten-year term as a

condottiere was marked by two embarassing defeats; in 1435, the Venetian force of which he was a part was defeated by the Milanese; and after he joined the Milanese army, it was defeated by the Venetians in 1440.[6]

It was administration which proved to be his forte and it was through his efforts in this sphere that he gained recognition. When Leonello succeeded Niccolò in 1441, he generously provided Borso with a number of rich benefices and titles. The shrewdness of his ensuing policies earned him admiration from members of his family, from the *Savi* (members of the ruling council of Ferrara) and the Ferrarese populace. But even his reputation as an able administrator did not render certain his accession to the *Marchesate*. As Leonello lay dying, he named his twelve-year old son, Niccolò di Leonello, his successor.[7] Next in line were Niccolò III's legitimate sons, Ercole and Sigismondo, should Niccolò di Leonello have failed to procure his rightful title. In other words, Borso's legal claim to authority in Ferrara was feeble.

The ambitious Borso, nevertheless, took advantage of his popularity and through clever manipulation, he ultimately came to govern the state. Technically, the *Marchesate* was an elective office and the Vicarate was a papal appointment; but, both titles had become virtually hereditary and had been passed on in the Este dynasty to the eldest legitimate son. He was able to win the support of the *Savi* for as Niccolò's oldest surviving son, according to a strict interpretation of

the law of primogeniture, he was the successor to the offices of *Marchesate* and Vicarate.[8] Furthermore, Borso convincingly argued that Niccolò di Leonello was too young to assume any responsible position. He also ensured that Ercole and Sigismondo would not have the opportunity to speak on their own behalf to the council (the brothers were not informed of Leonello's impending death, and, hence, they were absent from Ferrara when he died).[9] Thus, in defiance of Leonello's wishes and contrary to the family's customary laws of succession, he was elected *Marchese* of Ferrara and his claim to the title was quickly confirmed by Pope Nicholas V.

The new ruler was the second consecutive illegitimate son to come to power in Ferrara. The implications of this troubled him and affected the nature of his expenditures, most noticeably in the early years of his reign. It was not unusual for a bastard to rise to power in fifteenth-century Italy -- witness the ascension of Sigismondo Malatesta and Federigo da Montefeltro -- but bastardy had definite disadvantages.[10] The life of any *Quattrocento* ruler was precarious, for in Italy the division between the nobility and lower classes was less distinct than in countries such as France and England. Even an established prince, whose ties to a traditional ruling family were unequivocal, could be ousted by other members of his family, by a triumphant *condottiere* or by an eminent citizen.[11] Borso, who had himself challenged the hereditary conventions of his own family, clearly recognized the threat

to his authority posed by rightful heirs, other Este bastards and powerful Ferrarese families. Consequently, he proceeded to direct considerable sums of money to public monuments and works, and to religious foundations, in part, to extend his popular appeal.[12]

His first project was the completion of a monument to his father which had been initiated in 1443 during Leonello's reign.[13] The erection of the structure did not involve a display of Magnificence on Borso's part, for he was not responsible for the original proposal nor for the raising of funds for the work; but his initiative in the final stages of the monument's execution does illustrate his attempt to emphasize his alleged right to the *Marchesate*. Niccolò III was still highly regarded by the Ferrarese and he had been deemed *pater patriae* by them. A public statue in his honour would be a reminder of his accomplishments and was intended to generate a sense of pride among Ferrara's citizens. By having the monument finished, the governing *Marchese* demonstrated the respect and loyalty which he felt towards his father and the Este dynasty. He hoped to be praised by his subjects for his decisiveness and integrity. Moreover, his name would be associated with that of Niccolò and the familial link between the two would be impressed upon the subjects' minds.[14] Therefore, the act of completing the monument reaffirmed his right to power and diverted attention from his illegitimacy.

A plot, which was launched by Borso's enemies in 1451 and which seriously jeopardized his hegemony, inspired him to pursue a program of lavish expenditure beginning with the construction of a monument to himself. The adherents of Leonello's son, otherwise known as the *veleschi* (after *vela* or sail, the *impresa* which the young Niccolò had appropriated from his father) schemed to depose the reigning *Marchese* and to replace him with Niccolò. However, the plot was exposed, promptly quashed and the conspirators mercilessly executed.[15] It was hoped that such immediate and severe action would deter any further treasonous outbursts. The monument, proposed by the *Savi* in 1451 (probably following the suggestion of the vain ruler himself)[16] was to serve a similar purpose - it was designed to secure widespread approval of his reign from the populace of Ferrara. A representation of himself, strategically located in a public square, was an ideal means of propagating his image to his subjects and of constantly reminding them of their current ruler's identity. The monument was not completed until 1457 and the finished work commemorates an achievement which he attained only after the original inception of the project - the investiture of the title of Duke of Modena and Reggio by Emperor Frederick III. He is depicted wearing the ducal beret, bearing the baton of office and sitting in a ceremonial chair, a traditional emblem of power.[17] This motif had to have been introduced sometime after 1452 and, therefore, does not reflect the original function of the monument. The

expensive and glorious structure had been intended to enhance the city's piazza and to impress natives and visitors alike. Like the tribute to Niccolò III, the statue was to instill feelings of civic pride. Furthermore, it was a direct affirmation of the *Marchese's* power and authority.

The monument indicates the traditional nature of the new ruler's patronage; Alberto and Leonello had displayed Magnificence by erecting monuments and he too conformed to this established custom. His monument was placed alongside those of his father and grandfather and, thus, he was associated with his predecessors in a visual manner.[18] Since a statue of Leonello was noticeably lacking in the piazza, Leonello rather than Borso appeared to be the outcast in terms of the Este succession. Although the *Marchese's* project may show a lack of imagination it was, nevertheless, an expression of his Magnificence, for it involved considerable expense and planning.

While the Borsian monument was still in the planning process, the Este ruler initiated another substantial enterprise partially aimed at earning the loyalty and support of the Ferrarese populace. He adopted an impressive program of public works in 1451 which served to extend his reputation for Magnificence. The improvements, many of which were not begun until 1454 were costly, time-consuming and received the attention of almost every citizen. He executed the projects with an apparent disregard of cost and he impressed his subjects

with his paternalistic concern for the beauty of the city and the welfare of its inhabitants.[19] The works included the completion of the Campanile and other structures within the city. In addition, the city walls were lengthened to embrace the Isola di Sant'Antonio and its monastery (an important Ferrarese religious centre) and were stretched to the Po's banks bringing the city into contact with the trade route along its southern border.[20] Subsequently, the burghers not only prided themselves on the fairness of their city but were pleased by the *Marchese's* interest in their religious and economic well-being. His Magnificence was exhibited even in his endeavours in hydraulic engineering, for great expense was involved in the river diversion, land reclamation, drainage and attempts at flood control which were carried out most frequently on the lands of great feudal lords. A conscious effort to cultivate Magnificence is evident in his selection of the *paraduro*, a type of barrier used for flood control on the Po, as one of his *imprese*.[21] The use and application of this device (as in *La Bibia di Borso d'Este*)[22] acted as a reminder of his contribution to public improvements in Ferrara and of the Magnificence he manifested by funding them.

Borso's appeal to the masses and his exhibition of Magnificence through the installation of civic works was conventional, for such projects had long been an interest of the Este rulers. Niccolò III had been responsible for building roads and levees and it was during his reign that the bell

tower was erected and the *piazza del commune* paved. Leonello also had repaired walls, built dikes and implemented land reclamation schemes.[23] The governing family had to maintain and extend the city wall in order to sustain a degree of security for Ferrara and to incorporate the increasing number of people settling on its outskirts. Other works such as flood control (which was rather ineffectual) and construction of roads merely fulfilled the feudal obligations which the Este, as benevolent lords, owed their subjects. Borso continued to perform these duties, but on a much greater scale. Therefore, he used a traditional outlet of Este expenditure to display his Magnificence and to capture the respect and fidelity of his subjects. Furthermore, the continuity of Este policy on public improvements stressed the familial relationship between himself and his forefathers and, consequently, his claim to authority in Ferrara.

A persistent feeling of insecurity is apparent in his almost obsessive pursuit of popular approval. He embarked upon yet another magnificent project in 1452 - the erection of a Carthusian monastery. The Carthusian Order was highly respected throughout Europe and was noticeably absent from Ferrara. It particularly appealed to the aristocracy who admired the Order's rigorous asceticism and lack of corruption. The Este ruler's selection of this Order above all others was influenced by its untainted reputation, for its purity reflected upon the patron himself. Earlier, he had been

praised for lesser acts of religious patronage. For example, Michele Savonarola, the court physician, wrote of the *Marchese's* support of the Convent of Corpus Christi:

> His magnificence is well demonstrated by the splendor of the expenses which he still makes. And also this same thing is shown, as I said, in the building of such temples as those to which he has made such magnificent contributions.[24]

Since this earlier instance of religious patronage earned him such sycophantic approbation, Borso anticipated that the construction of the Certosa would secure for him excessive acclamation from all elements of society. After all, the city's possession of such a prestigious foundation would be a source of pride for all its citizens. A Carthusian Charterhouse had been founded in 1450 in the splendid city of Milan and now Ferrara could boast its own Carthusian establishment.[25]

During the initial years of his reign, the monastery of San Cristoforo was unquestionably the most magnificent of Borso's expenditures. He contributed the sum of five hundred *lire* a month towards its construction costs and, eventually, the Order received feudalities worth two thousand gold ducats a year and complete exemption from customary taxes and duties.[26] The monastery consisted of a number of buildings including a church, a cloister, a guest house and a personal palace, the latter of which served as further testimony of his Magnificence. As it was unusual for a patron to build such a residence within

the confines of a monastery, the palace tended to emphasize the role he played in the development of the Certosa. The building projected an image of the ruler as an extremely pious patron, for he decorated his apartments with scenes of "hermetic asceticism."[27] That these rooms were decorated at all suggests that his chambers were not completely private and that he planned for others to view these religious frescoes.[28] His display of Magnificence was enhanced, for his patronage seemed the result of sincere religious impulses.

While his sponsorship of the Certosa, in a sense, was not a departure from Este custom, his family previously had not supported the Carthusian order. Beatrice d'Este had founded the Nunnery of Sant'Antonio Abbate in 1249 while, in 1403, Niccolò III had built the Monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli, both of which were foundations of the Observantine Dominicans (Borso continued to maintain these through donations and dispensations during his lifetime).[29] The patronage of Beatrice and Niccolò found a direct parallel in the construction of the San Cristoforo complex, although the latter accomplishment was far more impressive in terms of expense and magnitude. This project successfully stressed the continuity between the spending policies of Niccolò and of his son, as the ruling *Marchese* once again exhibited his Magnificence in a customary Este fashion.

The Certosa, the various civic works and the Este monuments were intended to serve a public purpose and to widen

the Ferrarese prince's popular support. These endeavours also emulated activities of his predecessors, particularly those of his father and he thereby gained a more secure position as a respected member of the Este dynasty. He also dispensed substantial sums in his open pursuit of the title of Duke. Pope Pius II was not swayed by the gifts offered by this man who "*desired to seem rather than to be* magnificent and generous,"[30] but the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick III was more responsive. Borso "loaded him with honours and gifts and thus persuaded him to raise the earldom of Modena [and Reggio] to a duchy and create him Duke."[31] Having achieved this status, the new Duke was markedly more confident about the security of his political position. This growing sense of confidence surfaced in his display of Magnificence; however, he did not abandon the practice of imitating the patronage of his predecessors and he continued to manifest Magnificence in conventional ways.

When Borso was invested with the Dukedom in 1452, he took advantage of the occasion to glorify and advertise his accomplishment with one of the most famous entries of the mid-*Quattrocento*. An entry was a form of spectacle in which a ruler's accession, or some other important event in his life, was celebrated. Generally, the sovereign would be welcomed by the clergy, town officers, merchants or guild members at the city gate and together they would form a procession which paraded through the streets.[32] These affairs were welcomed by

the citizenry, for usually a holiday was granted and extravagant festivities were presented. The Duke's entry was propagandistic as well as entertaining - it created an image of Borso as an ideal ruler.[33] Every character and symbol appearing in the pageant implied that he was the epitome of a prince. He was first greeted by Reggio's patron saint, St. Prospero, who was floating amidst clouds and beneath a beautiful *baldacchino* (or canopy) supported by angels. While songs of praise were sung, a group of cherubims, situated on a rotating platform, presented a sceptre and a set of keys to the ruler. Then, before being seated upon a throne mounted on the first pageant vehicle, Justice and Genius addressed him as angels and lawgivers (situated on the same car) observed the ceremony. The second carriage, drawn by unicorns (Borso's most common *impresa)*, carried Charity who proudly held high a flaming torch. The final vehicle, and the most popular among the crowd, was in the form of a ship (reminiscent of classical pageant cars). The whole troupe moved towards the church of San Pietro and upon arrival, the glorious Duke was crowned with a laurel wreath by St. Peter. Later, Julius Caesar offered him seven beautiful women (representing the Virtues) and in the concluding events he received a gift of palm branches.[34]

Most entries were grand and pompous affairs and, as has been noted, they focused on a ruler as

> the incarnation of the State, the anointed of God, the *pater patriae*, the defender of Holy Church and of Religion, the heir of mighty ancestors, the source of all beneficence whose rule showers peace, plenty and justice on his subjects, and causes the arts to flourish.[35]

Such an assessment of this form of spectacle describes the entry into Reggio accurately. In particular, the presentation by St. Peter indicated the church's confirmation of the Duke's new title and the repeated depiction of the Virtues reflected his alleged personal attributes. Furthermore, the Ferrarese sovereign was treated as a triumphant hero (the offering of palm branches, symbols of victory) and he was likened to the Emperor Caesar himself; this bold comparison indicates the emergence of a new dimension in Borso's character - self-assurance. On the whole, the allusions to his power, authority and virtue combined with the marvelous mechanical contraptions, the delightful pageant cars, the prodigious number of participants, the striking costumes and the staging of the entry in the manner of an antique triumph produced an aura of Magnificence which lingered in the minds of the overwhelmed spectators for some time.

A lavish entry was hardly a new way of displaying Magnificence and, yet, Borso demonstrated that the medieval convention could still well serve an ambitious ruler. *Quattrocento* princes, including the Este *Marchesi*, frequently made use of this type of festivity. However, the Duke's entry exceeded those of his predecessors and of his contempor-

aries in both brilliance and extravagance. His subjects were not likely to forget the occasion nor the fact that their prince now possessed greater political influence than his illustrious predecessors. By increasing the scale of the spectacle, he exhibited his Magnificence in a truly memorable manner.

Borso took advantage of his investiture to demonstrate his Magnificence in a more permanent way. Immediately following his coronation by Frederick III, new coins including golden *lire*, silver *grossetti* or *soldi*, and a few smaller values were issued in Ferrara.[36] Most of these were modelled after those of the Roman Empire. Roman coins, which often bore the emperor's profile and phrases praising the government's achievements, clearly had a propagandistic function.[37] The Ferrarese coins were used in a similar capacity; the idealized portrait of the Duke which was clearly identified as "Borso d'Este, Duke of Modena and Reggio" conveyed a flattering image of him to his subjects and emphasized his newly acquired honour.[38] Furthermore, the new money ensured that his presence would be felt and seen during every type of monetary transaction which took place in the state or with its citizens.[39]

Borso's reputation for Magnificence grew as a result of the transformation of coinage. Changing the system was a troublesome and expensive process involving the designing and minting of new coins and, subsequently, replacing the old money with the new. Every subject of Ferrara would have been

aware of the innovation and of the prince's guiding influence in the scheme. After all, the coinage in Ferrara had not been significantly altered since the late fourteenth century.[40]

The Duke's display of Magnificence through coins was not incompatible with the expenditure of previous Este rulers. In 1381, Niccolò II reformed the money with the introduction of the Ferrarese pound or *'Lira Marchesana'*. For Niccolò, the coin symbolized the consolidation of Este control in the state, for as the name of the coin implies, the *Marchesi* of Ferrara (namely, the Este) were now the guarantors of the money.[41] Leonello also minted some of his own coins, some of which may have been modelled after ancient examples, but he is primarily remembered for the medals which he commissioned.[42] Borso had also commissioned a variety of medals,[43] but like Niccolò II, he realized coins had a greater circulation (he could project his image and advertise his political ascension to the greatest proportion of the population possible). Since the issuing of new coins in 1453 was comparable to Niccolò II's activity, the alleged legality of the Duke's position as heir to the Este dynasty was stressed. At the same time, he celebrated a great political achievement with a conventional exhibition of Magnificence.

The investiture marks the end of Borso's ambitious program of public patronage. After he had widely publicized his prestigious new rank, he felt sufficiently confident and secure to direct expenditure to more private commissions. He

no longer felt compelled to cater to the needs and demands of the Ferrarese populace even though occasions arose later in his reign during which his hegemony was threatened by conspirators. Instead, he concentrated on impressing fellow rulers, important prelates and other men of influence with his commissions. He aspired to become Duke of Ferrara, an honour which only the Pope could grant, and he believed that he could best demonstrate his qualifications for this coveted title by continuing to cultivate Magnificence. His expenditures, however, remained largely reminiscent of those of his predecessors.

The Duke's first major private commission, initiated in 1455, involved the creation of an illuminated Bible. The contract for the work suggests that he wanted it to be a truly magnificent volume - one which he could display to his discriminating contemporaries with great pride.[44] This aim was achieved, for the *Bibbia di Borso d'Este* is one of the most beautifully illustrated manuscripts to be produced in fifteenth-century Italy. Ten or more miniaturists executed about a thousand separate illuminations during a period of six years. The pages are decorated with elaborate flowery borders, superb filigree designs and intricate penwork. The text on each page is frequently accompanied by an illustration of the corresponding story as well as by nature studies and ornamental designs rendered in gold. In addition, a page in each book of the Bible contains a *principio* or incipit (an

extension of the illumination into the space which would normally be occupied by text) and the border of this same page is often enhanced with the Este coat of arms or with one of Borso's *imprese*.[45]

Magnificence was effectively manifested through this splendid Bible. As a religious work, such a volume was deemed worthy of considerable expenditure according to the current understanding of the notion.[46] The *Bibbia* glorified the word of God in a most exquisite manner and served to reflect Borso's piety as well as his Magnificence.[47] Extreme precaution was taken to ensure that the Duke would be identified as the patron of this remarkable manuscript by the inclusion of the family arms and personal devices throughout it. In the opening of the *Book of Genesis*, alongside the scenes of the *Creation of Adam* and the *Tree of Knowledge*, the Este crest and a number of Borso's *imprese* including a diamond ring, a unicorn and a *paraduro* are depicted.[48] His personal symbols appear frequently and occasionally are quite large in comparison to the remainder of the decoration.[49] However, the coat of arms is far more common and pervasive than the individual *imprese*. In at least one instance, the dynasty's crest is the main focal point of the page.[50] The repetition of arms and devices, page after page, imply that the association of Borso with his Bible was of substantial significence to him. The volume, although a personal possession, like any other piece of art was to be exhibited to friends, courtiers and

dignitaries whom he hoped to impress. In 1467, the Bible was removed from the Este library and was shown to some visiting Bolognese ambassadors who were already aware of its reputation for beauty. In 1471, the Duke carried the manuscript with him on a trip to Rome so that it might be displayed to the various prelates and nobles whom he met during his travels.[51] The more often he exposed the Bible, the more his reputation for Magnificence increased.

La Bibbia di Borso d'Este had a precedent in previous Este patronage. Niccolò III had commissioned an illustrated Bible with which such celebrated bibliophiles as Cardinals Bessarion and Aeneas Sylvius (later Pope Pius II) were well acquainted.[52] Once again Borso imitated his father's patronage as a means of emphasizing his legitimacy as ruler of Ferrara. This point was no longer directed to the subjects from whom he had previously sought approval, for few people outside the courtly circle would have known about either Bible. With a sense of assurance, he hoped that this message would be propagated to politically influential persons who might help him attain the title to which he aspired.

In the years that followed, the ruler experienced a few political setbacks but they did not convince him to return to a policy of large-scale public expenditure. The first crisis occured in 1455 when Ferrara lost some valuable territory - first Barbiano and Castelnuovo di Sotto to the Milanese and later Bagnacavallo to the Venetians.[53] This

humiliation was followed by a frustrating visit from Pope Pius in 1459. Borso offered to support his proposed crusade against the Turks if Pius would only make him Duke of Ferrara and surrender the rights that the church claimed in the state. The Pope refused to co-operate and both of their ambitions remained unfilfilled.[54] A third blow came in 1460 with the discovery of a plot against the Duke's life. The principal secretary of the ducal chancery, Uguccione dell'Abbadia was accused of treason after failing to report that a certain Pietro Paolo had proclaimed his intention to kill the Este ruler. Uguccione was likely framed, for it was Paolo who brought the matter to the prince's attention; nonetheless, the secretary was executed and his estate was redistributed.[55] The conspiracy may not have seriously endangered the prince's position, but the affair demonstrates the existence of a strained atmosphere between himself and his advisors. In light of these reverses, he did not return to the type of public spending characteristic of his early years in office. His confidence unshattered, he continued to spend money on semi-private commissions and, subsequently, to seek more prestige and greater political authority.

His next major expenditure attracted the attention of many dignitaries and renowned patrons in Italy - the family residence in Ferrara, the Palazzo Schifanoia, was renovated. Architecture was the most prestigious way to display Magnificence in the *Quattrocento* and changing the family structure

illustrates Borso's attempt to conform to this vogue. The exterior form of the building was altered and the interior of the palace was redecorated; each improvement served a different function. Construction began in 1465 and was completed within four years; a second floor was added to the existing base as was a new staircase joining this storey to the garden side of the building. The *palazzo's* façade was enhanced with a superb marble frontispiece with the Este coat of arms located above the doorway and a unicorn situated atop the adjunct. The roofline was enriched with merlons (the raised portions of a parapet) and sculptured creatures, while painted niches flanked pilasters decorated with a candelabra design. Painted stucco ornamentations on the façade may have been introduced at this time as well.[56]

The renovation or construction of a family palace was deemed a magnificent act, for a beautiful residence like the Schifanoia added a sense of elegance to the city and was intended to increase civic pride. Ferrara's citizens were expected to feel honoured that their prince lived amidst such resplendent surroundings. But, the improvements possessed yet another function for its renovator. It has been remarked that it was essential for a ruler to improve or erect a family domain in order to

> exhibit an identity, to show the power or piety of the man and his family dynasty, and to carve out a space in the city that would belong to that name, that individual and dynasty, for all times...it was a mark of power held and dynasty prolonged.[57]

The new Schifanoia emitted a sense of power and glory which reflected upon the Duke and his family. He had chosen to rebuild the existing family *palazzo* rather than to construct a new one and thereby maintained a continuity with his dynastic heritage. The Schifanoia Palace had been raised by Alberto d'Este, circa 1385[58] and since that time it had always served as the principal urban residence for the family. A number of rooms had been added to it over the years, but Borso's improvements were the most extensive. By transforming the traditional Este home into a majestic, modern palace, he consolidated the space which his family had appropriated in the city and he displayed his Magnificence in a manner which proved his worthiness to govern Ferrara as its Duke.

The interior decoration of the Schifanoia surpassed the brilliance and magnificence of the architectural alterations and overwhelmed those who were fortunate enough to view it. Several of the rooms were elaborately adorned, including the *Sala degli Stemmi* and the *Sala degli Stucchi*;[59] but the hall used for such major social functions as assemblies, banquets, special ceremonies and other public celebrations was by far the most striking. This room, known as the *Sala dei mesi* (Room of the Months) is decorated with frescoes divided into twelve distinct sections representing the months of the year. Each panel is further subdivided into three horizontal bands: the uppermost consists of the mythological gods and goddesses who oversee each month; the middle portrays the

corresponding zodiacal sign and *decans*; and the lowest depicts the Duke and his subjects participating in a number of activities (related to the labours of the month) within urban and rural settings.[60]

Taken as a whole, the main function of the frescoes is to project an image of Borso as a perfect and rightful ruler and this is accomplished through the implication that he presides in the real world as he does in the paradisical. In the March fresco, peasants happily tend to such duties as trimming vines and retting flax while the Duke casually passes his obedient subjects on his way to a hunt. In the lower section of this same band, he dispenses justice while surrounded by his admiring courtiers. The view presented in this lower zone is that of a joyous and well-ordered world.[61] Furthermore, this terrestrial band is related to the Olympian band through the use of similar landscapes suggesting that the realm in which the Este ruler governs is an earthly paradise.[62] Finally, the whole world of the frescoes is linked to the real world through the use of illusionistic devices which infer a continuity between the space in the frescoes and of the actual room itself. For example, in the lower section of the April fresco, the legs of a seated hawking attendant appear to hang over the frieze and into the room. The association of these bands with one another and with the real world implies that the idealized ruler and the hierarchically structured society portrayed in the hall is a true depiction of Borso and of

Ferrarese society.[63]

The Duke ensured that his identity as patron of the murals be unmistakable, for his portrait appears at least two or three times in each tableau. These paintings also record another manifestation of his Magnificence; a number of the sumptuous festivals which he held during his reign appear to have been illustrated in the *Sala dei mesi*. On the south wall there is a scene with two groups of jousters and behind them a tall, thin pole topped by a platform with people seated upon it. The various structures and the banners of St. George and the Dragon correspond in part to descriptions of the 1464 festivities held in the Saint's honour.[64] In the April fresco, the annual race down the Via Grande in Ferrara (again, on St. George's Day) is clearly represented.[65] It has been suggested that the occasion depicted in each of the lowest bands is an historical event of a festive nature.[66] One of the frescoes may even have illustrated Borso's pompous entry of 1453.[67] Considering his love of spectacle and the remaining fragments of the frescoes which vividly portray tournaments and races, it is plausible that the Schifanoia frescoes included specific scenes from various festivals put on in his lifetime. Hence, the *Sala dei mesi* was a tribute to the Magnificence he displayed in the sponsorship of these. Those dignitaries who had the opportunity to behold the hall during banquets and festivities were surely impressed by this complex and fascinating exhibition of Magnificence.

The Schifanoia murals were preceded by similar ones in other Este residences. The fresco cycle focusing on courtly and chivalric pursuits originated in France and spread to Northern Italy in the late fourteenth century.[68] It was at this time that Alberto d'Este decorated the villa of Belfiore with a series of frescoes centering on the *Marchese* and his courtiers engaging in leisurely activities such as hunting.[69] These works must have inspired Borso's decision to commission those for the Schifanoia palace. His contemporaries likely compared the two efforts and, hence, would have associated the Duke with his highly respected predecessor. However, the fact that he had imitated Alberto's patronage certainly did not effect the atmosphere of self-assurance and Magnificence created by the Schifanoia decorations.

In 1469, Borso's authority was challenged by the Pio family and the incident may have influenced his determination to display Magnificence in a somewhat crude but extremely effective manner; he built a foreboding mountain which came to be known as Monte Santo. Members of the family which had governed Carpi and traditionally served the Este loyally schemed to depose the Duke and replace him with Ercole d'Este. They confided in Ercole, but he disclosed the plot to his half-brother. Consequently, the conspirators were captured, tried, and either imprisoned or executed.[70] It was shortly after this affair, early in 1470, that orders were given to start construction of a mountain just southeast of Ferrara.

It was not a popular project and widespread discontent resulted, as noted in the following contemporary remarks:

> On account of this thing all the *popolo* suffered greatly, because it was of no use whatsoever, and the *contadini* [those peasants forced to offer their services] could not work their lands by reason of this labour; and he had this mountain where it is called Monte Santo; and the *popolo* complained about it greatly.[71]

Borso ignored these complaints, indicating his disinterest in popular approval at this stage in his reign, and he demanded that work on the edifice continue.

It has been suggested that the mountain was intended to be the setting for a villa which would serve as a retreat from the blistering, summer heat of the Ferrarese flatlands;[72] but, the Duke's perseverence in the face of extensive oppostion suggests that the function of the artificial mountain was more profound than this. He had recently been insulted by a group of traitors and he needed to reassert his power and to regain the respect of his peers. By creating a mountain, he expressed his lordship even over nature;[73] alteration of the countryside was not an attempt to glorify God but to equal his work. The project was ultimately abandoned, for Borso, finally created Duke of Ferrara, left for Rome to receive his investiture. Upon his return he fell fatally ill and the mountain remained incomplete. Nevertheless, the time and labour invested in the construction of the landmark paid off, for it remains a tribute to his Magnificence. As has been remarked, "[t]he sole living trace of the glories of Estean *villegiatura*

is the artificial mountain..."[74]

With the creation of Monte Santo, the Este ruler exhibited Magnificence in a truly innovative and unusual manner. Neither his predecessors nor his contemporaries had attempted such a bold feat. He appeared to have overcome the drive to imitate the patronage of previous Ferrarese *Marchesi* and, thus, seemed to be on the verge of a turning point in terms of his selection of expenditures. He became Duke of Ferrara in 1471, after the more responsive Pope Paul II had succeeded the uncooperative Pius. During his trip to Rome to receive the investiture, he travelled with a company of over five hundred noblemen, hundreds of liveried servants and one hundred and fifty pack mules.[75] These ceremonies and festivities far surpassed those of 1453, but whether he would have continued on this path of more lavish and creative display of Magnificence will remain undetermined. Within a few months of these joyous celebrations, he died and was laid to rest in a tomb at the Certosa following an appropriately majestic funeral.

Borso's expenditures embraced still other realms. As mentioned earlier, he commissioned many medals (usually bearing his portrait and *imprese*) which were circulated among a restricted circle of courtiers and dignitaries. The greater proportion of these were created after 1460, thus substantiating the notion that once created Duke, he was more concerned about impressing his peers than his subjects.[76]

He also supported the Ferrarese university, the *Studium*, and it experienced a considerable growth during his reign. Although he lacked a passion for scholarship, he sought prestige for his school by encouraging the faculties of law and medicine. His academic patronage was principally inspired by the desire to earn a reputation in the sphere of intellectual advancement.[77] He was also a patron of music, retaining ten to fifteen muscians at his court; but, his contribution to this art was not very impressive.[78] His commissioning of medals and his support of the *Studium* and of music can again be seen as a continuation of established Este patronage. It was Leonello who had been largely responsible for the development of the notable school of medallists of which Borso later took advantage.[79] Furthermore, the university had been founded by Alberto in 1391 and both Niccolò and Leonello had ensured its survival.[80] In the area of music, Niccolò had employed a few instrumentalists but did not regularly patronize singers. Later Leonello founded a court chapel, but it was disbanded during Borso's reign in favour of instrumental performers.[81] The Duke's patronage in these two areas emphasizes his consistent imitation of the patronage and spending policies of his predecessors. His monument, the Certosa, the entry of 1453, the new coins, the illuminated Bible and the renovation of the family palace were all somehow related to the activities of earlier Este rulers. The means by which he chose to manifest his Magnificence were also

visibly influenced by current vogues including the patronage of architecture, of certain religious foundations and of illustrated manuscripts. Only the artificial mountain was a truly unique expression of Magnificence.

The changing nature of Borso's Magnificence reflects the growing sense of political security which he developed during his long reign. The burst of public spending just after his accession indicates that he recognized the precariousness of his position; his illegitimacy and the ambitions of other heirs did little to reassure the newly elected *Marchese*. Following his ascension to the Dukedom of Modena and Reggio, he acquired some confidence. First of all, he used patronage to advertise his new status but he then started to commission more private and sophisticated works. Fortunately for the Duke, the prosperity and peace which characterized this period in Ferrarese history permitted him to turn his attention and income towards more personal pursuits. As such projects as the Certosa and various civic improvements were still underway, there was no need to initiate any new public schemes. His self-assurance and display of Magnificence culminated in the creation of Monte Santo, an unpopular endeavour which he undertook despite a tremendous public outcry. His lifelong efforts were finally rewarded with the acquisition of the title of Duke of Ferrara. This was a major contribution to the consolidation of the Este dynasty (a process which found a parallel in other ruling families such as those in Urbino

and Milan). But Borso reached the apogee of his career too late in life to exploit his achievements for the further benefit of his family. However, his half-brother Ercole was to assume power with all the titles, authority and prestige a Ferrarese sovereign reasonably could ever hope to achieve. Although his reign was to be plagued by political turmoil, the advantages of legitimacy and inherited honours allowed him to manifest Magnificence more creatively than his immediate predecessor and to rule with the grandeur of an esteemed aristocrat.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Borso, an illegitimate son of Niccolò III d'Este succeeded his brother Leonello to the Ferrarese *Marchesate*. Although a poor scholar and *condottiere*, he proved to be a clever administrator and a very capable and popular ruler. In 1452, he became Duke of Modena and Reggio and later, in 1471, just months before his death, the first Duke of Ferrara. A spirited and flamboyant individual, he courted praise and delighted in lavish display. He was the patron of many a festival as well as of such exquisite works as *La Bibbia di Borso d'Este* and the Schifanoia frescoes. He was also a pious man who faithfully observed his religion and apparently led a celibate life (he never married or had children). His reign was a peaceful and prosperous one and was hailed a "golden age" by contemporaries and posterity alike.

For further information on Borso see:

Edmund G. Gardner, *Duke and Poets in Ferrara* (London, 1904), pp. 67-121.

Gustave Gruyer, *L'art ferrarais a l'époque des Princes d'Este*, 2 vols. (Bologna,1969), I, pp. 46-69.

Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, pp. 127-172.

Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, pp. 29-30. A more comprehensive bibliography on Borso d'Este may be found here.

[2]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 17.

[3]Rosenberg, "The Certosa," p. 335.

[4]*Diario Ferrarese dall'anno 1409 sino al 1502 di autori incerti*, Giuseppe Pardi, Ed., in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 2nd ed., XXI.V, pt. 7 (Bologna, 1928), p. 17. Parisina was executed along with Ugo. Niccolò believed that Ugo had turned to her because he had not been assured of a secure political future. Leonello was, therefore, legitamated in order to prevent the repetition of a similar situation.

[5]Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, p. 36.

[6]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 11.

[7]Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, p. 68.

[8]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 60.

[9]Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, p. 69.

[10]Martines, *Power and Imagination*, pp. 239-240. For more information on the careers of Sigismondo Malatesta and Federigo da Montefeltro see Geoffrey Trease, *The Condottieri, Soldiers of Fortune* (New York, 1971).

[11]John A. Symonds, *The Renaissance in Italy: Age of the Despots*, I (London, 1937), pp. 90-101.

[12]Several motives were involved in Borso's patronage including piety, prestige, self-glorification and aesthetic pleasure, but the use of patronage and Magnificence as political propaganda and in the fulfillment of personal ambitions has been deliberately isolated and emphasized in this study. For motivation behind patronage in the *Quattrocento* see: Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 1-3; Burke, *Tradition and Innovation*, pp. 106-108; Clough, "Federigo da Montefeltro's Patronage," pp. 129-144; Gundersheimer, "The patronage of Ercole I d'Este," pp. 1-18; and Jenkins, "Cosimo de'Medici's patronage,"pp. 162-170.

[13]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 59. Leonello, who succeeded Niccolò III in 1441, has been called *pater civilitas*, the forefather of Ferrarese culture. Tutored by the renowned humanist, Guarino da Verona, he soon earned a reputation as an *homme de lettres*. He wrote sonnets, Latin orations and enjoyed classical drama. He lacked an appreciation for the visual arts, but he loved beautiful objects and, thus, became a collector of cameos, jewels and ancient medals. He also patronized the foremost medallist of the century, Pisanello, built new palaces, sponsored lavish festivals and initiated various public works programs. His reign was brief but his record of patronage was impressive and it served to influence the spending activities of his brother Borso. See Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, pp. 92-126 and Giuseppe Pardi, *Leonello d'Este* (Bologna, 1904).

[14]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 60.

[15]Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, p. 69.

[16]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 61

[17]*Ibid.*, p. 66. Note that Borso did not select the equestrian form for his monument, a mode which was very popular in his day. His choice supports Rosenberg's contention that Borso was a poor *condottiere* and was not proud of his military record.

[18]*Ibid.*, p. 70.

[19]*Ibid.*, p. 17.

[20]*Ibid.*, p. 19.

[21]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 136.

[22]For a discussion of *La Bibbia di Borso d'Este*, see p. 49 below.

[23]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, pp. 82-83, 123-124.

[24]Michele Savonarola, *De Felici progressu illustrissimi Borsii Estensis* ... in Rosenberg, "The Certosa," p. 336.

[25]The rivalry which Borso felt towards the Milanese court may have been an immediate inspiration for the project. Also, the French origins of the Order found favour with Borso, for his belief that his ancestors were French and his subsequent fascination with anything French increased his attraction to the Carthusians. Rosenberg, "The Certosa," pp. 333-334.

[26]*Ibid.*, pp. 330, 334.

[27]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 110. In particular scenes from the lives of Saints Anthony Abbot, Paul and Macario (an Egyptian hermit) were depicted.

[28]*Ibid.*, p. 111.

[29]Rosenberg, "The Certosa," p. 330.

[30]Pope Pius II, *Memoirs of a Renaissance Pope: The Commentaries of Pius II, An Abridgment* (London, 1960), p. 114.

[31]*Ibid.*

[32]Strong, *Splendour at Court*, p. 23.

[33]*Ibid.*, pp. 23-27.

[34]Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (New York, 1960), pp. 293-294. Also see Charles M. Rosenberg, "The Iconography of the *Sala degli Stucchi* in the Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara," *Art Bulletin*, LXI (1979), pp. 379-380.

[35]Strong, *Splendour at Court*, p. 36.

[36]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 161.

[37]Ronald Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford, 1960), p.469.

[38]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 161.

[39]*Ibid.*, p. 162.

[40]*Ibid.*, pp. 57, 161. Issuing of coins is not generally considered an act of Magnificence. However, the commemorative nature of the coins, their artistic merit and their usefulness to the Ferrarese populace (as monetary exchange) qualifies Borso's transformation of the state's coinage as Magnificence.

[41]*Ibid.*, p. 50.

[42]Hill and Pollard, *Medals of the Renaissance*, p. 37.

[43]Gruyer, *L'art ferrarais*, I, pp. 583-650.

[44]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 125.

[45]J.J.G. Alexander, *Italian Renaissance Illuminations* (New York, 1977), pp. 24, 76-83, and *La Bibbia di Borso d'Este*, 2 vols., Adolfo Venturi, Ed. (Bergamo, 1961).

[46]For more information on the disbursement of funds for the Bible, see Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, pp. 119-123.

[47]*Ibid.*, p. 148.

[48]*La Bibbia di Borso d'Este*, I, fols. 5^{v} - 6^{r}.

[49]*Ibid.*, I, fol. 123^{r}. On this page, the *paraduro* is the outstanding device.

[50]*Ibid.*, II, fols. 234^{v} - 235^{r}.

[51]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, pp. 146-147.

[52]*Ibid.*, p. 145.

[53]*Ibid.*, p. 22.

[54]Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, p. 78, and Pius, *Memoirs*, pp. 114-115.

[55]*Diario Ferrarese*, p. 43, and Werner L. Gundersheimer, "Crime and Punishment in Ferrara, 1440-1500," in Lauro Martines, Ed., *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities 1200-1500* (Berkely and Los Angeles, 1972), p. 123.

[56]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, pp. 170-175.

[57]Martines, *Power and Imagination*, p. 236.

[58]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 168.

[59]Very little of the original decorations of the *Sala degli Stemmi* remain. The frescoes in the *Sala degli Stucchi* have been destroyed as well, but the stucco sculptures representing the Virtues are intact. See Rosenberg, "The *Sala degli Stucchi*," pp. 377-384.

[60]Paolo d'Ancona, *The Schifanoia Months at Ferrara* (Milan, 1954), pp. 10-12. A *decan* is an "astral deity invented by Hellenistic astrologers to afford a greater number of variables in formulating specific predictions...each *decan* governs a 10° arc of the zodiacal circle so that there are three *decans* to each sign." Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 190.

[61]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, p. 200. It is in this sense that Rosenberg compares the *Sala dei mesi* to the *Très Riches Heures*. He notes that the Schifanoia "frescoes present a world of strict hierarchical structure both in terms of the rigid division of labor between ruler and subject and the vertical linkage of heaven and earth. In this respect, the *Sala dei mesi* reflects the same adherence to aristocratic social values under the guise of elegance, optimism and delight that Panofsky detected in the calendar pages of the *Très Riches Heures* of the Duc de Berry," (p. 201).

[62]*Ibid.*, p. 200.

[63]*Ibid.*, pp. 200-201.

[64]*Ibid.*, pp. 202-203, and *Diario Ferrarese*, p. 45.

[65]D'Ancona, *Schifanoia Months*, p. 37.

[66]Rosenberg, *Art in Ferrara*, pp. 205-206. A considerable portion of the frescoes have deteriorated and, therefore, only fragments of the scenes in question remain.

[67]*Ibid.*, p. 206.

[68]*Ibid.*, pp. 207-208.

[69] Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, *Art and Life at the Court of Ercole I d'Este; The 'De Triumphis religionis' of Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti*, Werner L. Gundersheimer, Ed. (Geneva, 1972), pp. 23,68-69.

[70]*Diario Ferrarese*, pp. 60-61.

[71]*Ibid.*, p. 66. Translation from Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 155.

[72]Felton Gibbons, "Ferrarese Tapestries of Metamorphosis," *Art Bulletin*, XLVIII (1966), p. 410.

[73]Martines, *Power and Imagination*, p. 267.

[74]Gibbons, "Ferrarese Tapestries," p. 410. There is no single complete account of the construction of Monte Santo. See *Diario Ferrarese*, p. 66.

[75]Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, pp. 109-115.

[76]I would like to thank Dr. W. Tresidder for bringing this matter to my attention. See Gruyer, *L'art ferrarais*, I, pp. 583-650.

[77]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, pp. 162-163.

[78]Lockwood, "Music at Ferrara," pp. 105-106.

[79]Hill and Pollard, *Medals of the Renaissance*, p. 38.

[80]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, pp. 59, 64-65, 100.

[81]Lockwood, "Music at Ferrara," pp. 104-105.

CHAPTER III

THE MAGNIFICENCE OF ERCOLE D'ESTE

Ercole d'Este succeeded Borso in 1471 and governed Ferrara until 1505.[1] The new prince immediately set out to earn distinction as an extraordinary member of the Este dynasty and as a celebrated patron of the arts. He maintained the policy of large-scale expenditure, as established by his predecessors, but his luxurious and ostentatious lifestyle surpassed even that of his flamboyant half-brother. As the first Este to accede to the office of Duke of Ferrara and, thus, possessing greater status and more extensive authority than had the Ferrarese *Marchesi*, his Magnificence served as a reflection of the dignity and power of his noble standing. The nature of his grandiose patronage also indicates his growing conviction that his social position was indeed a special and privileged one.[2] The initial stages of the development of an upper-class consciousness were evident in Borso's display of Magnificence, but his self-assurance and behaviour were overwhelmingly affected by his illegitimacy and its political ramifications. Ercole, in contrast, was the legitimate heir to recently acquired and highly coveted titles and this provided him with a degree of security which his predecessor had lacked. The confidence

with which he ruled was conveyed through the magnitude of his financial disbursements and the accentuation of class differences in his commissions.

Ercole's Magnificence could not escape the influence of immediate political considerations, including a devastating war and the subsequent need for reconstruction (in particular, rebuilding and expanding the city and ameliorating social distress). He turned to public spending, in part, to alleviate some of Ferrara's problems and also to regain the respect and approval of his disillusioned subjects and discriminating peers. Nevertheless, his patronage does not reflect the sense of insecurity which had plagued Borso. Instead, his expenditures and commissions earned for him admiration as an influential *Quattrocento* patron and extended Ferrara's reputation as a leading European cultural centre. That he was able to govern with a consistent boldness and to continue emphasizing class disparities in his unique manifestations of Magnificence further demonstrates the crystallization of an upper-class identity in later fifteenth-century Italy.

Ercole's assumption of the Dukedom was not certain at first, but his claim to the title was strong and, thus, his sense of political stability was intense. He was the eldest legitimate son of Niccolò III and his wife, Ricciarda da Saluzzo. He did not receive any special attention from

his father, as Leonello had been already selected as the heir to the *Marchesate*, but his mother ensured that he was properly educated. In 1443 he was sent to Naples where he adapted well to rigorous military and chivalric training and he quickly achieved renown for his excellence in dueling and jousting and later as a skilfull and dependable *condottiere*.[3] Because Borso had never married or had any children, both Ercole and Niccolò di Leonello were approached as possible successors to the duchy.[4] Ercole though, had the advantages of being Niccolò III's legitimate offspring, of being older than his rival and of possessing an impressive military record. He then ingratiated himself with the reigning Duke by revealing to him the treasonous machinations of the Pio family in 1469; from this time his accession was assured.[5]

Ercole encountered serious opposition from Niccolò di Leonello, but the ensuing conflict worked to his advantage. As Borso lay dying in 1471, the two adversaries and their supporters clashed in a disruptive civil war. The Duke recovered from his infirmity long enough to end the fighting and after he died the Ferrarese *Savi* rushed Ercole into office (Venetian ships remained docked in the city should the succession have been contested).[6] The new sovereign immediately waived a number of taxes, freed several prisoners, released grazing lands for public use, rewarded loyal officials and ended the monopoly on the sale of salt.[7]

This 'routine largesse' was an instrument commonly used by the Este *Marchesi*, other princes and European monarchs to win the trust and fidelity of their subjects. Whereas Borso, obsessed with increasing his popular support, had followed it with a number of substantial public projects, the new Duke did not plunge into a similar program. Feeling sure of himself, he pursued patronage at a leisurely pace and his commissions were distributed relatively evenly throughout his reign.

His first display of Magnificence was the celebration of his rise to the Dukedom. This was an extremely important occasion for Ercole because he was the first Este to accede as Duke of Ferrara, Modena and Reggio. This position demanded maintaining more important diplomatic missions, entertaining influential dignitaries more frequently, and generally enjoying a more stately lifestyle than if he were to have governed as a *Marchese*.[8] Thus, his ascension exacted a grander and more memorable jubilation than did those of previous Ferrarese rulers. The festivities, which took place on August 20, 1472, were described by a contemporary as follows:

> On this day a Mass of the Holy Spirit was sung by the clergy of Ferrara in the presence of the court; there was a solemn procession, as on the Feast of Corpus Domini in Ferrara, in which members of the House of Este walked, dressed in cloth of gold...Cannons thundered across the piazza, bells rang out, shops and manufactories in the city were closed as though it had been Sunday.[9]

These remarks relate the gravity of the initial formalities as well as the gaiety which followed. The masses were always delighted with an opportunity to forget the drudgery of their usually monotonous lives; but whereas Borso had captivated them with remarkable contraptions, splendid pageant cars and the like in his famous entry into Reggio, Ercole's procession was far more somber and the emphasis was placed on the luxurious costume that clothed the Este family. All draped in gold, the clan must have been an inspiring sight. The effect was a subdued but memorable display of Magnificence. Rather than overwhelm his subjects with superfluous decorations, the Duke chose to convey a sense of dignity and solemnity through the event.

The Este sovereign planned to celebrate his accession on an annual basis and, thereby, to exploit ritual to exhibit Magnificence. He hoped to impress the Ferrarese, year after year, with the significant outlay of expenses required to put on such a lavish fête.[10] Furthermore, he intended to please them with this addition of another annual holiday to their calendar. The similarity between this type of regular tribute and that awarded to saints could not have escaped the notice of the citizens. Eventually, this affair would become somewhat routine, but it would serve as a regular reminder of Ercole's glorious assumption of the title of Duke.

The people of Ferrara expected their new ruler to provide extravagant festivities on the occasion of his investiture, but the annual commemoration of such an event on a large scale would have been considered exceptional. Even his predecessor, who had thoroughly relished any sort of spectacle, restricted festivities to the usual assortment of religious and civic holidays and to single, limited affairs in honour of visiting guests or personal achievements. Ercole's decision to celebrate yearly his accession suggests that he believed his accomplishment deserved special treatment, even comparable to that given to a saint. Furthermore, it implied that he merited greater distinction than any of his predecessors. This message, which was directed both to his subjects and peers, was still fairly subtle in this particular display of Magnificence; but as his reign progressed and as he expended more of his income on festivals and on the arts, it became increasingly clearer.

The Duke's subsequent manifestation of Magnificence captured the attention of all of Italy and of many parts of Europe; in 1473, he married Eleanora of Aragon, daughter of King Ferrante of Naples. The view of both Aristotle and Aquinas, that it was appropriate to spend a substantial sum upon a socially important wedding, was widely accepted in the *Quattrocento*. Marriage in a ruling family signified the survival of the dynasty as the birth of legitimate heirs usually resulted from such a union. It also led to the

acquisition of new allies or to the strengthening of old ones.[11] Ercole was indeed interested in producing an heir and in cultivating new political relationships; but he also realized that marriage to a woman from a wealthy, respected, and influential family would act as a reflection of his own grandeur and opulence.[12] The more lavish the bridal train and wedding festivities, the more admiration and esteem he would receive from contemporaries.

The extravagant Este wedding was initiated with the customary escort of the bride from her homeland to her new domain by representatives of both courts. The train's first main stop was in Rome where Eleanora stayed in a palace especially constructed for the occasion. From there it journeyed to Florence where it was entertained and housed at a considerable expense to the city (over 10,000 florins were spent on the affair). When the retinue arrived in Ferrara, the prospective Duchess was greeted by Ercole, his courtiers and subjects all clad in brilliant gala costumes. Together they proceeded down a main street (along which trees had been planted particularly for this reception) where they were welcomed by youths dressed as special days of the year and as planets. A public holiday was declared the day of the wedding ceremony and the subsequent week was filled with tournaments, feasts, balls and other amusements.[13] This spectacular event made a deep impression on the memories of the Ferrarese people.

Ercole deliberately exploited his own wedding in order to create an aura of Magnificence. He delayed any marriage plans for himself until he became Duke, for had he married earlier, the wedding celebration would not have been considered of any great importance by European monarchs. As Duke of Ferrara he was in a more favourable position to partake in a majestic and pompous wedding with a bride from a prominent family. He also realized that such a glorious affair would likely delight his subjects, for the last time that the Ferrarese had shared in such an elaborate wedding was in 1444 with the marriage of Leonello d'Este and Maria of Aragon.[14] Hence, the Duke's nuptials must have had special significance for the generation of citizens who had not previously participated in the marriage festivities of a governing member of the Este dynasty. They must have been overwhelmed by the magnitude and expense of the jubilation and the new groom's popularity among them could only have increased.

A wedding was not a novel means of displaying Magnificence; nevertheless that of Ercole tended to set him apart from his predecessors. The Duke's marriage accentuated the fact that his half-brother Borso had never been wed and that he had left no heirs; it stressed that his own offspring and not those of any other Este would some day govern Ferrara. Furthermore, the reigning prince was the first Este to marry into such an exalted dynasty as that of

Naples and he thereby raised his own family's prestige and augmented its political authority to an unprecedented level. His refusal to settle for a woman from a notable Ferrarese family or even for an illegitimate daughter of a powerful prince (as Niccolò III and Leonello had done) indicates that he held an inflated opinion of his position as an Italian Duke. His marriage to the daughter of the King of Naples and the extravagant display of Magnificence which it entailed was intended to convey to all his contemporaries the notion that he was more eminent and powerful than any previous Este ruler.

The eruption of political turmoil in the later 1470's in Ferrara and in Italy as a whole tended to encourage Ercole's public expenditure. In 1476, his hegemony was endangered by an attempted coup led by his arch-rival Niccolò. Leonello's son did not accept the negligible role he played in Ferrarese politics and, thus, when the birth of a male heir (Alfonso d'Este) threatened his political aspirations, he mustered a force of over six hundred men and invaded Ferrara. The Duke, headed towards the villa Belriguardo, heard of the attack and was intimidated by reports that Niccolò's adherents numbered in the thousands; he promptly withdrew to gather more men of his own. In the meantime, the ruler's faithful brothers, Sigismondo and Rinaldo, confronted the *veleschi* in the city and captured all the leaders of the revolt. Ercole returned to Ferrara the

following day and eventually had his nephew and many of the other conspirators executed. In customary Este fashion, the goods and property of the condemned were confiscated and redistributed to those who had remained loyal to the prince.[15]

Although this rebellion was ultimately quashed, its strength indicated that Ercole was considerably less popular than his predecessor. Borso, too, had encountered conspiracies during his reign but each one had been revealed and suppressed early in its development. Niccolò had been frustrated in his attempt to turn the Ferrarese people against their Duke but that he was able to invade the city at all with a sizable group of supporters was a discouraging sign for the Este ruler. Furthermore, Ferrara's relations with other states, in particular Venice, had notably deteriorated in the 1470's. Ercole arrogantly violated Venice's salt monopoly and consistently aggravated its resident magistrates.[16] The powerful republic, which had designs on the fertile territory surrounding Rovigo, was disturbed by the Duke's independent behaviour. Venice had restrained its aggression, for the Ferrarese sovereign had found himself a reliable ally in Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan. However, the latter was assassinated only months after the *veleschi* uprising and no capable heir was left to govern his state.[17] Thus, having lost its most valuable ally, Ferrara was placed in an extremely vulnerable position.

The situation grew even worse as Venice aligned itself with Rome, another of the Duke's enemies.[18]

The implications of the unsuccessful coup and the possibility of war convinced Ercole of the necessity of securing his subjects' fidelity. He realized that maintaining a policy of public expenditure was still one of the most effective means of doing this and of re-establishing his authority. Such was the purpose of the grandiose monument to himself which he planned to erect in his city. In the early 1480's he had a huge marble column transported from Verona to a location near Ferrara. An equestrian statue of himself was to be placed on top of it and the spectacular structure was to be moved to a public piazza. Unfortunately, while the column lay unerected, the hostility between Ferrara and Venice broke into open war and work on the project was postponed. The statue designed by Ercole Grandi was never completed although the column was raised in 1499.[19] A representation of the poet, Ludovico Ariosto, whom the Duke had patronized, was eventually mounted on the column where it remains to this day.[20]

The finished monument was not executed according to the original design, but it nevertheless demonstrates Ercole's intention to manifest Magnificence. He selected a traditional form of Este patronage in which to exhibit it, but his monument was deliberately meant to surpass those of Alberto, Niccolò and Borso in terms of beauty and especially

size. It was to be the largest memorial in Ferrara and would thereby reflect the fact that he ruled the state as its Duke. His decision to erect such an imposing monument may have been further influenced by his receipt of yet another honour; in 1480, he was awarded the Order of the Garter by Edward IV of England. This symbol of chivalry and probity did not increase his political power, but it was a prestigious award which Italian rulers, such as Federigo da Montefeltro, and European monarchs prized highly.[21] It placed Ercole in the same category as kings and other respected and influential rulers. Thus, the Duke had even greater reason to flaunt a regal image of himself to his contemporaries.

The monument was intended to increase popular approval of his reign, but unlike that of Borso, it would have reflected a very strong sense of assurance and independence. This is suggested by the placement of the column in the main square of the *Addizione Erculea* (a new section of Ferrara built by Ercole in the 1490's)[22] instead of in the piazza in which the other Este tributes were located. By planning to disassociate visually his monument from those of his predecessors, he accentuated his individuality and nonconformity to Este conventions. Although the statue of the Duke was never executed, the memorial to Ariosto remains a testimony of Este Magnifence, for it has served as a constant reminder of the family's patronage

of the poet.[23]

The war which disrupted the construction of the Ercolean monument had a profound effect upon the prince's subsequent display of Magnificence. In 1482, Venice, with the Pope's approval, struck out at Ferrara with powerful and devastating force. It was virtually paralyzed, for Sixtus had refused passage to the Duke's allies, and Venice easily penetrated Ferrarese territory. The contryside was ravaged and eventually the city of Ferrara was itself besieged; famine and disease spread quickly and even the Este ruler fell ill to a near fatal fever. The Pope, horrified by the destructiveness of the Venetians, ultimately prevailed upon them to abandon their siege of the battered city. A treaty was signed in 1484 according to which the victorious republic took possession of Rovigo and the Polesine, and procured the right to operate salt works in Commachio and Zaniolo. For Ferrara the peace had come too late, for it had already been decimated.[24]

The crushing defeat destroyed the Ferrarese subjects' confidence in their ruler and pride in their state, and it was imperative that Ercole restore these as quickly as possible. It has been asserted that for the *Quattrocento*, "war was a matter of course, as a red splash on Fortune's turning wheel;"[25] but the Ferrarese had not experienced a serious war for decades and they were hardly accustomed to and accepting of the upheavals it caused. They were

especially unprepared for the ensuing poverty. A contemporary observed that many "have gone from prosperity to want, and lack anything to cover their bodies or sate their hunger..."[26] These circumstances prompted the Duke to implement a program of public expenditure partially aimed at alleviating the miseries of his subjects and at diverting their attention from their woes. His Magnificence, nevertheless, continued to reflect a distinct sense of self-assurance; his commissions more blatantly emphasized his conviction that he was worthy of more recognition than were his predecessors and that the element of society to which he belonged was a special one.

Following the war, Ercole introduced secular theatre to Ferrara and through this entertaining medium he manifested Magnificence in a creative and truly splendid fashion. Throughout the fifteenth century, Italian theatre had overwhelmingly been dominated by sacred presentations, such as of the slaying of the dragon by St. George as seen in Ferrara in 1449.[27] Prior to the Duke's reign, the closest rendition of a secular play was the reading of the comedy *l'Iside* (by Francesco Ariosto Peregrino) in the presence of Leonello and an exclusive audience in 1444.[28] It was not until 1486 that the Ferrarese court (including Isabella d'Este, the *Marchesana* of Mantua) and public witnessed a secular work, Plautus' *Menaechmi*, shown in the main courtyard of the ducal palace. It was an extraordinarily lavish

production with a new stage, backdrops, galley (complete with sails) and platform for the audience constructed especially for this occasion. A contemporary estimated that over ten thousand spectators watched the four hour performance including the dazzling intermezzi and the brilliant finale of fireworks.[29]

Ercole spared little expense to impress everyone with this sensational revival of classical comedy.[30] It cost over 1,000 ducats to produce this single performance, a sum equal to the annual salary of three notable professors at the *Studium*.[31] More significantly, this play was only the first in a series of costly presentations. In 1487, *la Favola di Cefalo* (written by the Este ruler's contemporary, Niccolò da Correggio) was seen by the Ferrarese populace; this work, inspired by that of Ovid, was the first example of Italian drama on the stage.[32] By the end of the Duke's reign, most of Plautus' major plays, a number of Terrence's works, a pantomime of the labours of Hercules and several traditional religious plays had been shown before considerably large audiences, including visiting dignitaries, in the city. It was not merely the magnitude of his expenditure which was exceptional but also the fact that classical and modern comedy and drama were presented by the illustrious ruler. Only in papal Rome had this type of theatre, on a similarly lavish scale, been produced earlier.[33] Thus, Ercole demonstrated that not only could he exhibit Magnifi-

cence in a manner distinctly different from that of his predecessors but that he could compete with and exceed the patronage of the prestigious court of Rome. It was a major step in restoring his city's reputation as a cultural vanguard and his own pre-eminence as a powerful sovereign and discriminating patron.

Ferrarese theatre was also a 'bread and circuses' type of diversion aimed at transferring some of the joviality of the court to the lives of the citizens. This is most clearly indicated by the fact that many of the outdoor performances were held during the coldest months of the year, a time when both morale and provisions were running low.[34] The Duke intended to distract, at least temporarily, his subjects from problems caused by financial distress. Ironically, the presentations also accentuated the prosperity of the nobility, for they tended to dress in the most opulent finery for these occasions. It is very likely that many spectators came to these performances primarily to view the Ferrarese élite. Undoubtedly, they were most impressed by the brilliance of the dress of their ruler and of his immediate family. This ostentatious display was deliberate on Ercole's part; public theatre provided yet another opportunity for him to appear regularly before his subjects clad in his most superb costumes. At the same time, a sense of distance between himself and the greater part of the audience was maintained by the physical separation of the two groups;

the Duke and his entourage sat on a special platform built in the palace courtyard.[35] Thus, although Ferrarese theatre was directed at increasing the Este ruler's popularity, it also enforced his image as a dignified and stately sovereign and, in general, emphasized the social gap between his echelon and the masses.

In addition to theatre, charity became another important outlet for Ercole's display of Magnificence. Involvement in philanthropic activities had always been considered an essential princely duty and the Duke had consistently fulfilled this obligation. For example, in 1473 he initiated a tradition of collecting food for the needy by soliciting donations, door-to-door, while accompanied by a troupe of noblemen and musicians.[36] The gesture met with great approval and this must have prompted him to adopt a similar custom following the debilitating war with Venice; he held an annual banquet for the poor during the Easter season. The humanist, Sabadino degli Arienti, observed one of the later feasts and wrote:

> At the end of the great hall was the head table, where there were thirteen *poor citizens who were reduced to the status of paupers*. One of them was a priest who sat in the middle, in most holy and divine memory of Christ at the Last Supper; and the others up to the number of the apostles. The other tables were placed along the sides of the hall, and at them sat all the other assembled poor. At the first table [sat Ercole]; at the others [his] sons and [his] brothers;...[37]

This description indicates the growth of poverty after the crisis of the mid 1480's as well as the formality which characterized this affair. The humanist further mentions that the male members of the Este dynasty served their guests a meal fit for royalty. They heartily consumed sturgeon, trout, gilthead and carp, roast meats, wines, and desserts made of sugar confections all of which were served upon the most exquisitely set tables. After the feast, the assembly retired to another hall where their feet were washed by the Este.[38]

The enormous expenses involved in catering this yearly banquet significantly enhanced Ercole's reputation for Magnificence. Although a limited number of subjects directly benefited from this act of charity, knowledge of the ritualistic feast would have been widespread. Besides impressing his contemporaries with this substantial expenditure, the Duke hoped that the event would serve as a reflection of his piety and that his behaviour (serving the poor and washing their feet) would be likened to that of Christ. His conduct would have been considered unique for his predecessors had not exhibited Magnificence in this way; their charitable efforts had been restricted to more traditional conventions such as church donations. Perhaps extravagance in this sphere was not previously necessary, for extensive poverty was not a chronic problem in Ferrara until the last decades of the century. Nevertheless, the reigning Este demonstrated his resourcefulness in

exploiting distressing economic circumstances to his advantage.

The Easter banquet also proved to be a clever display of power and wealth. Ercole's actions involved a role reversal whereby he became a beggar.[39] This charade emphasized his elevated position, for as a Duke his servile manner came as a surprise to his subjects. On the other hand, this humble act took place amidst luxurious surroundings. By holding this feast in the family palace, many people were exposed to the dynasty's lavish lifestyle. They must have been overwhelmed by the grandeur of the *palazzo* and by the generous hospitality of the Este. Such an effect was intentional; the prince was certainly aware that his guests would be struck by the social, cultural and material differences between their own lives and that of their hosts. The Duke behaved modestly and magnificently on this special occasion but he also ensured that his visitors would be humbled by the majestic environment and pretentious formalities.[40]

The physical decimation of Ferrara during the war induced Ercole to manifest his Magnificence in yet another fashion; he invested enormous sums of money into the reconstruction and expansion of the state capital. When he assumed the Dukedom, Ferrara was a "medieval city without a personality"[41] in spite of Borso's numerous modifications. Its streets were narrow and tortuosly winding and they were

cramped with dilapidated houses. The war had proved the fortifications to be inadequate, for established areas on the outskirts had been either endangered or destroyed, and the city centre itself had been jeopardized as a result of insufficient protection. Later, the city could not properly accommodate its increasing population, a problem further aggravated by a sizeable influx of Jews from Spain in 1492.[42] With the hope of restoring civic pride and of beautifying and modernizing Ferrara, the Duke procured the celebrated architect, Biagio Rossetti, to design a new addition to the city.

The project, begun in 1492, was extensive and extremely costly. The old moat was turned into a major throughway uniting the old part of the city to the new. A number of other streets were laid out including the two main axes of the *Addizione Erculea*, the Corso di Porta Po (which continues as the Corso di Porta Mare) and the Corso Vittorio Emanuele (as it is currently called). The nobility was encouraged to build new *palazzi* along these routes and many obliged. Sigismondo d'Este's inspiring Palazzo de' Diamanti and Francesco da Castello's elegant Palazzo Sacrati were only two of many new residences erected there.[43] A remarkable number of religious structures were also built in the area known as '*Terra Nova*', among which were S. Francesco, S. Lorenzo, S. Spirito and the glorious church of Santa Maria degli Angeli. Subsequently,

the *Addizione* was further linked to the older section of Ferrara by the extension of the city walls. The new bulwarks were not oppressive enclosures, but instead followed the natural geographical formations surrounding the city.[44] They were strategically interspersed with three imposing gates and sixteen unique circular bastions.[45] Most of the major construction had been completed by 1501, aside from that on individual edifices, and the *Addizione* was soon deemed a worthy model for urban planners--a reputation which it retains to this day.

'*Terra Nova*' earned for its patron celebrity, approbation and admiration. Sabadino lauded its straight and wide streets, its splendid houses and its open spaces. He noted that it was "certainly a marvellous thing to see and is worthy of everlasting praise."[46] Ariosto dubbed Ferrara an "exquisite fortress" and a trans-Alpine visitor, Hartmann Schedel, echoed this view in the *Nürmberg Chronicle*.[47] Ercole was assured that the city's new image would be securely linked to his name when the addition was entitled the *Addizione Erculea*. He attempted to strengthen this association in a number of ways, as in planning to raise his monumument in the central piazza of '*Terra Nova*'. Although this specific ambition remained unfulfilled, the Duke was more successful in publicizing his Magnificence in other ways.

Just as Borso had advertised his ascension to the

Dukedom of Modena and Reggio through coins, so Ercole commemorated his role in the building of the *Addizione*. In 1493, the Este ruler introduced the testone to the Ferrarese monetary system.[48] This large silver coin, whose value equalled the tax which each subject paid towards the financing of the city's expansion (in other words, the tax was one testone per person), bore a portrait of the Duke. Its style was unusual, for the image was cut off very sharply at the neck and traditional beading was not used to separate it from the legend. This motif suggests that the coin was inspired by those of classical times.[49] Its reverse clearly alluded to the construction of '*Terra Nova*' and to the prince himself; it depicted a seven-headed hydra. This creature was a swamp dweller and the early stages in the extension of the city involved draining the Ferrarese swamps. Furthermore, the destruction of the Lernaean hydra was a labour of Hercules (Hercules being Ercole's most common *impresa*).[50] Thus, the portrayal of this mythological animal and of the Duke, and the value of the coin itself all served as reminders of his Magnificence as displayed in the *Addizione*.

Previous Este rulers had made considerable contributions towards civic improvement and city expansion, but even Borso's ambitious efforts were dwarfed by the magnitude and brilliance of '*Terra Nova*'. The Duke virtually converted swampland into an urban paradise and this accomplishment

was likened to that of Augustus. As one contemporary wrote:

> Just as he found Rome in brick and left it in marble, so too will your Celsitude, by virtue of your Magnificence, be recognized by posterity with great glory. For you found a Ferrara of painted brick, and you will have left it...carved in adamantine marble...among the wonderful cities of the world.[51]

The parallel to the Emperor is sycophantic but doubling the size of Ferrara was a truly exceptional feat. Moreover, Ercole did more than refurbish parts of the city established by his predecessors; he built up an entirely new area. He thereby distinguished himself from the Este *Marchesi* and successfully asserted his individuality. He intended to be remembered as the Ferrarese Duke who built a glorious, modern *Quattrocento* city.

The *Addizione Erculea* also served as an instrument by which the prince could convey a strong image of his own power and authority. He realized that parades and solemn processions were more effective visually when seen marching down broad and straight avenues. The sight of massive divisions was awe-inspiring in comparison to a view of narrow and extended lines of people crowded on winding streets.[52] The breadth of the new throughways also permitted the Duke and other members of the nobility to travel on horseback or in pompous carriages through the

city. The limitations of the older streets had previously compelled rich and poor to walk together.[53] '*Terra Nova*' became somewhat of a retreat for the politically influential and wealthy classes, for they were now geographically separated from the poorer sectors of Ferrarese society. This indicates that Ercole possessed a very clear conception of his class as a distinct and privileged group whose interests he felt obliged to support.

Political turmoil again threatened Ferrara's safety in 1494, but even in these uncertain times the Este prince avidly pursued Magnificence. Ludovico Sforza of Milan, in the hope of destroying his nephew and rival, invited the ambitious Charles VIII of France to invade Naples.[54] Ercole maintained friendly relations with the French monarch but, in general, remained neutral for fear of the wrath of Venice and Rome. Charles returned to his homeland leaving Ferrara intact, but within a few years another forboding menace, Louis XII of France, emerged. Again the Duke stayed neutral while the French ravaged other parts of Italy; but his position was soon compromised when Pope Alexander IV forced a marriage between his illegitimate daughter, Lucrezia Borgia, and Alfonso d'Este. The Ferrarese ruler had promised his son to a French noblewoman and he feared that the change in plans would be interpreted as an insult by the invading king. Fortunately, serious confrontation with France, Venice and other potential adversaries was avoided.[55]

Despite these disconcerting circumstances, Ercole continued to exhibit his Magnificence confidently and in a manner which earned him recognition throughout Europe. By increasing his expenditures in the realm of music he transformed Ferrara into a noted musical centre. Music had become a prestigious outlet for the patronage of fifteenth-century princes. Many courts, including Naples, Milan, Rome, Burgundy and Savoy, retained large chapels usually filled with Northern singers.[56] The Este sovereign also augmented his chapel by importing renowned musicians, such as Johannes Martini, from Northern Europe.[57] By 1480 it had surpassed those of the Milanese and Papal courts in terms of size, talent and expense.[58] It was also at this time that the famous singer-composer, Josquin Desprez, wrote his Mass, *Hercules Dux Ferrarie* and that the Duke began to establish ties with important European musical centres.[59] This development was temporarily curtailed with the outbreak of war with Venice. Sabadino degli Arienti noted that the financial strains caused by the conflict resulted in the fusion of the two separate units of the chapel into a single, smaller choir.[60] However, after the mid 1480's, the prince expended more money on musical patronage than ever before.

In the last years of the *Quattrocento*, Ercole persistently sought out the best singers, the most famous composers and their most recent works. Even during the

French invasion, he implored his son Ferrante, who was then part of the French royal entourage, to obtain music from Charles VIII's *chantre ordinaire*, Loyset Compère. Ferrante wrote his father that the composer

> was extremely sorry not to be able to furnish Your Lordship with any good compositions because the only works he has with him are old ones. He finds that he left behind in France certain of his books in which he has some good new compositions, and will be glad to satisfy your Lordship as soon as he is able to do so.[61]

This message indicates that the Duke was interested only in Compère's newest and, thus, most sought-after works. He also continued to request the music of Josquin, whose sacred compositions he received in 1501 and 1502.[62] More significantly, the Este ruler procured his services from 1503 to 1504. Jacob Obrecht, a leading master of the time and possibly the finest after Josquin, also came to Ferrara in 1487 and again in 1504. Ferrara was the only European court in which these two great composers served consecutively.[63]

Ercole impressed even his most distinguished contemporaries with his Magnificence as displayed in the patronage of music. The cost of maintaining such popular artists as Josquin and Obrecht must have been enormous as was that of employing a large chapel. In 1500 he regularly paid at least twenty-seven singers as well as several

instrumentalists and a company of trumpeters. In 1503 he employed twenty-nine singers and in 1504, thirty-one in addition to three organists; the Papal chapel boasted of only twenty singers.[64] Furthermore, the Duke's primary concern was sacred music. He most frequently requested examples of the polyphonic Mass and those musicians seeking his patronage usually sent him Masses, Magnificats or sacred motets.[65] His love for religious music was a reflection of his piety and consequently served to increase his Magnificence.

The Este prince ensured that his fame as a patron of music would endure by instilling his children with a passion for this art. Ercole was a practical musician not without considerable talent and, thus, it was not surprising that music played an important role in the education of his children. Each of them exhibited natural musical ability and Alfonso, Ippolito, Beatrice and especially Isabella became influential patrons of this art in their own right.[66] Although their interest lay in secular rather than in sacred music, Ferrara together with Mantua remained a focus of Italian musical development for several generations.

The Duke's initiative in the sphere of music gained for him considerable recognition among his contemporaries and it tended to set him apart from his predecessors. He encouraged the cultivation of music at his court and spent

more money in this realm of patronage than any previous Este ruler. Ferrara was not entirely without a musical tradition, but it was Ercole who was responsible for its new reputation as a musical vanguard; it now ranked highly among the influential musical centres of Europe. He had demonstrated that his court was capable of leading such a cultural movement.

Ercole was aware that the type of music which he enjoyed was that which appealed mainly to the upper class of society. As the century drew to a close, the distinction between music for the nobility and for the masses grew noticeably clearer.[67] The sacred music which the Este ruler procured would not have been performed publicly except perhaps during intermezzi of religious plays or during special ceremonials. It was his courtiers and visiting guests who comprised the audiences of his private musical presentations. The vast majority of his subjects, who undoubtedly knew about his sizeable chapel and of his ensemble of composers, were deliberately excluded from this particular pastime. Thus, the Duke used music as a cultural barrier, emphasizing the differences between those who had access to the more refined style of the art and those who did not.

Ercole's exhibition of Magnificence involved other realms than those already mentioned. His patronage of scholarship, not surprisingly, was extensive. He contributed considerable sums to the maintenance of the *Studium*

and he saw to its qualitative improvement. He hired more reputable professors and encouraged more serious scholarship than had his immediate predecessor.[68] The Este library also experienced a significant expansion during his reign; he added many historical and philosophical works, both classical and contemporary, in which he personally took great delight.[69] Furthermore, there is evidence that the Duke redecorated many of the Este residences with beautiful fresco cycles. Sabadino has described several rooms in Belfiore decorated with scenes of the hunt, of jousts, of a pilgrimmage to Santiago de Compostela and of important events in the life of Eleanora d'Este. Belriguardo apparently was embellished with frescoes portraying Ercole among his courtiers as well as the classical Psyche story based on Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.[70] His religious patronage was vast as well; he supported many religious confraternities and he built a convent and several other religious edifices. Public festivals and special events continued to be celebrated gloriously by the Este sovereign and his subjects. Two particularly lavish affairs were the weddings of two of his children: that of Isabella to Francesco Gonzaga in 1490; and that of Alfonso to Lucrezia Borgia in 1502.[71] In all of these endeavours, it is evident that the prince consciously attempted to surpass, in magnitude and beauty, those of the Este *Marchesi*. He always ensured that his contribution to any sphere conveyed an overpowering sense

of majesty and Magnificence.

In the first years of the new century, the Duke's health rapidly deteriorated and he died in 1505, leaving the Dukedom to his son Alfonso. His death marked the end of a half century during which Italy saw a considerable increase in the level of Magnificence, a heightened level manifested in Ferrara under Ercole. The projects and works planned and commissioned by him were far more extensive in size and scope and considerably more expensive than those of his predecessors. This development found a parallel in other Italian courts such as Urbino and Mantua where the ruling families were spending more on patronage than ever before. In Ercole's case, he deliberately exceeded the Magnificence of previous Este sovereigns; as Duke of Ferrara, Modena and Reggio and as a Knight of the Order of the Garter, he believed that he should display more Magnificence than a *Marchese*. His extravagant expenditures ultimately earned for him distinction as a truly outstanding member of the Este dynasty.

As the magnitude of Magnificence increased in the later fifteenth century, the gap between the upper and lower echelons of society widened. The Este prince had exploited Magnificence to elevate himself before his subjects and to instil in them a sense of deference for him. He intentionally humbled the masses with his excessive expenditures and with his formal public appearances;

their role as a subservient element of society was clarified by the ostentatious behaviour of the Duke and of his governing contemporaries. Still, Ercole maintained the allegiance and respect of his subjects until the end of his reign, for through his Magnificence, Ferrara became one of the more illustrious courts of Europe.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The new Duke ruled Ferrara for thirty-four years. He was deeply religious and almost fanatical; much of his patronage was religious in nature and a large proportion of his expenditures was directed towards charitable activities. He was also a vain individual, concerned about his own glorification and possessing a keen sense of occasion; he easily transformed any public appearance into a glorious affair. Ercole was an able *condottiere* and his income as a professional soldier was excellent. Unfortunately, he was a less capable administrator and he proved to be a poor judge of men; still, under his leadership Ferrara survived a bitter war, devastating famine and two French invasions. Ferrara remained one of the more brilliant courts of Italy and it expanded its reputation as such throughout Europe.

For additional information about Ercole see:

Bertoni, *La Biblioteca*, (entire).

Luciano Chiappini, *Gli Estensi*, Milan, 1967, pp. 525-530. A more comprehensive bibliography on Ercole may be found here.

Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, pp. 120-465.

Gruyer, *L'art ferrarais*, I, pp. 126-255.

Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, pp. 173-228.

Gundersheimer, "The patronage of Ercole I d'Este," pp. 1-18.

Sabadino, '*De Triumphis religionis*', (entire).

[2]Martines, *Power and Imagination*, pp. 218-240. Martines convincingly argues that the development of a distinct upper-class consciousness in the later *Quattrocento* was

> keyed to changes in society. The fifteenth century recorded a growing concentration of wealth; more land and capital ended in fewer hands; entry into trade required larger disbursements of capital; credit was tighter and

> business risks increased. Patterns of marriage became more conservative, as exemplified in the trend toward later marriage and the upper-class demand for bigger dowries and stronger, more endogamous marriage alliances. In government and politics, the groups at the top planted themselves more firmly, drew increasingly away from the middle classes, and developed a deeper self-assurance, threatened only in moments of danger triggered by war. This overall process of social crystallization went with an intensification of the claims to family antiquity and lineage with the result that élite groups experienced an ever stronger sense of their being special, different, more elevated (p. 256).

[3]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 176.

[4]Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, p. 96. Apparently Borso did not want to confuse the matter of the succession by adding children of his own to the list of potential heirs.

[5]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 177.

[6]Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, pp. 118-120. Mantua and Milan supported Niccolò while Venice backed Ercole.

[7]*Diario Ferrarese*, pp. 73-74.

[8]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 203.

[9]*Diario Ferrarese*, p. 80. Translation from Lockwood, "Music at Ferrara," p. 109.

[10]Lockwood, "Music at Ferrara," pp. 108-109.

[11]Martines, *Power and Imagination*, p. 240.

[12]*Ibid.*, p. 219. Naples was the third major princely court in Italy following Milan and Papal Rome. Ferrara followed Naples.

[13]Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, pp. 134-136.

[14]*Diario Ferrarese*, pp. 27-28. Maria of Aragon was the illegitimate daughter of Alfonso the Magnanimous. Leonello's first wife, whom he married in 1435 and who died shortly afterwards, was Margherita Gonzaga of Mantua.

[15]*Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

[16]Ercole's desire to free Ferrara from Venetian influence can be seen in the light of his status as Duke of Ferrara. As such, he believed that he should govern with more authority than his predecessors and that his state should be independent. He regarded Venetian control a mockery of his position; only a break with Venice would give him the dignity accorded to a Duke. Whereas previous members of the Este dynasty had yielded to the republic, he refused to accept such servility. He did, however, hope to dissolve all constrictive ties with Venice peacefully.

[17]Gunderhseimer, "Crime and Punishment," p. 127.

[18]In 1478 Ercole became a commanding *condottiere* for a league comprised of Florence, Mantua and Venice. This alliance suffered a humilating defeat at the hands of Rome and Naples. A peace was declared in 1480, but Ercole had already earned the disfavour of Pope Sixtus IV. Subsequently, new alliances were formed with Naples, Florence and Milan on the one hand and Rome and Venice on the other. It was the latter association which spelled doom for Ferrara.

[19]Gruyer, *L'art ferrarais*, I, p. 526.

[20]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 201.

[21]The importance of the award to Federigo is indicated by the fact that the focal point of one of his paintings (the *Hampton Court painting*) is Federigo as a Knight of the Garter. Clough, "Federigo's Private Study," p. 285. Ercole also thought highly enough of the honour to have a portrait painted of himself wearing the Garter. This picture no longer exists but was described by Sabadino degli Arienti (a contemporary Ferrarese humanist who wrote a panegyrical discourse on princely virtues with Ercole as his prototype) Sabadino, '*De Triumphis religionis*', p. 62.

[22]For a discussion of the *Addizione Erculea*, see p.88 below.

[23]I would like to thank Dr. E. Beame for pointing this out to me.

[24]Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, pp. 165-211.

[25]J.R. Hale, "War and Public Opinion in Renaissance Italy," in Jacob, *Italian Renaissance Studies*, p. 97.

[26]*Capitoli della compagnia chiamata la scola de' poveri vergognosi sotto la protezione di S. Martino*, cited in Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 189.

[27]*Diario Ferrarese*, p. 27.

[28]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 210. See also Giuseppe Pardi, "Il Teatro Classico a Ferrara: Il teatro ferrarese al tempo di Ercole I," *Atti e Memorie della Deputazione Ferrarese di Storio Patria*, XV (1904), pp. 3-27 and E. Scoglio, *Il teatro allo corte Estense* (Lodi, 1965), pp. 21-38.

[29]Bernardino Zambotti, *Diario ferrarese dall'anno 1476 sino al 1504*, Giuseppe Pardi, Ed., in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 2nd ed., XXIV, pt. 7 (Bologna, 1934), pp. 171-172.

[30]Pardi, "Il Teatro Classico," p. 9.

[31]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 210.

[32]Pardi, "Il Teatro Classico," p. 9.

[33]For the origins of Italian theatre see Alessandro D'Ancona, *Origini del Teatro Italiano*, 2 vols.,(Rome, 1966).

[34]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 211.

[35]*Ibid.*, p. 210.

[36]*Diario Ferrarese*, p. 83.

[37]Sabadino, '*De Triumphis religionis*', p. 91. Translation from Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 188 (my emphasis).

[38]*Ibid.*, pp. 91-93.

[39]Martines, *Power and Imagination*, p. 232. Martines makes this observation about the annual collection of food for the poor but it can also be applied to the banquet.

[40]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, pp. 213-214. Gundersheimer notes that Ercole "in elegantly entertaining the poor...seemed to be exploiting his sense of occasion rather than reaching out toward human beings," (pp. 213-214).

[41]E.A. Gutkind, *Urban Development in Southern Europe*, IV (New York, 1969), p. 302.

[42]Bruno Zevi, *Biagio Rossetti, architetto ferrarese, il primo urbanista moderno europeo* (Turin, 1960), p. 144.

[43]Sigismondo was the Duke's brother and Francesco da Castello was Ercole's physician and intimate companion.

[44]Gutkind, *Urban Development*, p. 309.

[45]Sabadino, '*De Triumphis religionis*', p. 73. Sabadino comments upon the originality of these towers.

[46]*Ibid.*, p. 72.

[47]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, pp. 269-270.

[48]For a discussion of Herculean coinage see Gruyer, *L'art ferrarais*, I, pp. 583-651.

[49]Philip Grierson, "Ercole D'Este and Leonardo Da Vinci's Equestrian Statue of Francesco Sforza," *Italian Studies*, XIV (1959), pp. 41-42.

[50]*Ibid.*, p. 42.

[51]Sabadino, '*De Triumphis religionis*', p. 75. Translation from Gundershimer, *Style of a Despotism*, p. 265.

[52]Zevi, *Biagio Rossetti*, p. 144.

[53]*Ibid.*

[54]Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (Harmondsworth, 1973), pp. 127-130.

[55]Gardner, *Dukes and Poets*, pp. 295-315, 382-423.

[56]Frank A. D'Accone, "The Singers of San Giovanni in Florence during the 15th Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, XIV (1961), pp. 337-338. The Netherlands led European musical development from 1430 to 1570.

[57]Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance* (New York, 1959), pp. 220-222. Martini was an outstanding singer and composer of polyphonic music. He served at Ferrara in the 1470's and, for a time, was Isabella d'Este's music instructor.

[58]Lockwood, "Music at Ferrara," p. 119.

[59]*Ibid.*, pp. 109-110. Josquin was a singer at the Milanese Duomo from 1459 to 1470 where he achieved fame very quickly. Later he served the Papal, Florentine, Modenese and French courts. The Mass *Hercules Dux Ferrarie* became very well known for the "basic musical subject of the entire work was drawn from the vowels of the name itself [*Hercules Dux Ferrarie*], by substituting the solmization syllables for the vowels in order [re ut re ut re fa mi re]. The device was hailed an innovation..." (p. 109). See Reese, *Music in the Renaissance*, pp. 236-237.

[60]Sabadino, '*De Triumphis religionis*', p. 89.

[61]Ferrante d'Este to Ercole, October 7, 1494 cited in Lockwood, "Music at Ferrara," p. 115.

[62]Lockwood, "Music at Ferrara," p. 116.

[63]*Ibid.*, p. 122.

[64]D'Accone, "Singers of San Giovanni," p. 337. Organ music experienced great popularity in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries partially because of its demand in churches, but also because the range of the keyboard had been enlarged to allow greater scope for music.

[65]Lockwood, "Music at Ferrara," p. 115. A Magnificat is a song or hymn of praise (from Luke 1:46, "My soul doth magnify the Lord ") and a motet is a choral work on a sacred text for several voices.

[66]Howard M. Brown, *Music in the Renaissance* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1976), p. 99. Isabella is renowned for her role in the development of the *frottola* (a poem set to music). See also Julia M. Cartwright-Ady *Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua: A Study of the Renaissance*, 2 vols. (London, 1903), I, pp. 10,86.

[67]Friedrich Blume, *Renaissance and Baroque Music* (New York, 1967), p. 21.

[68]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, pp. 223-224.

[69]Gundersheimer, "Patronage of Ercole d'Este," p. 5. See also Bertoni, *La Biblioteca*, pp. 201-210.

[70]Sabadino, '*De Triumphis religionis*', pp. 51-65.

[71]Cartwright-Ady, *Isabella d'Este*, I, pp. 13-18, 198-216.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The patronage and expenditures of Borso and Ercole d'Este suggest that Aristotle continued to serve as a main authority on Magnificence in the second half of the *Quattrocento*. In addition, it is clear that certain aspects of the Aquinian notion, particularly the emphasis on religious patronage was still strong. The Magnificence of the Este princes also indicates that there was a considerable growth in its scale and that it was used freely by the Dukes to emphasize class disparities. The increase in the magnitude of patronage and its elitist ramifications demonstrate that the Ferrarese rulers, like many of their contemporaries, developed a more distinct conception of themselves as members of an aristocratic governing class.

Aristotle's guidelines on types of works and social affairs worthy of great expenditure were generally pursued by fifteenth-century patrons. Weddings, entertaining dignitaries and celebrating special events were crucial vehicles for the Magnificence of the Este. Borso's entry and Ercole's accession ceremony and marriage are just a few examples of such splendid affairs held in Ferrara alone. Ercole especially took advantage of such occasions, often repeating them annually. The behaviour of the Este in this sphere found a parallel in

reigning families throughout Europe; spectacle had become an acceptable, if not essential, means of displaying Magnificence.

Both Aristotle and Aquinas conceded that Magnificence could be manifested in the fulfillment of personal needs such as constructing and furnishing a home. The building of palatial dwellings and filling them with exquisite works of art made up a growing percentage of the patronage of the powerful and wealthy. For the Este, renovating and decorating *palazzi* and *delizie* was almost an obsession: the Schifanoia, Belriguardo and Belfiore were continually expanded and adorned with extraordinary frescoes and innumerable treasures. The aura of Magnificence created within these walls overwhelmed the resident courtiers and delighted the honourable guests. Some contemporaries deemed such expenditures frivolous and self-indulgent, but, on the whole, they were considered an appropriate outlet for Magnificence.

Aquinas' contribution to the exhibition of Magnificence by the Este and other Italian dynasties is most evident in the sizable proportion of their religious patronage. The Ferrarese Dukes, preoccupied with the notion of salvation and obliged to perform good works, regularly contributed to a variety of religious foundations and confraternities, introducing new orders and expanding existing institutions. Amongst Borso's and Ercole's greatest commissions are the San Cristoforo complex, *La Bibbia di Borso d'Este*, and the numerous churches erected in the *Addizione Erculea*. Ambitious religious works

were also produced throughout the courts of Italy and Europe; each endeavour glorified God and served to reflect the piety and dedication of the patron.

Despite the influence of Aquinas on religious patronage, the manifestation of Magnificence remained confined to the affluent, as Aristotle had prescribed. The Este, the Montefeltro, the Sforza and other *Quattrocento* princes adopted a particularly lavish and ostentatious brand of Magnificence. The grandeur of Borso's investiture ceremonies or of Ercole's *'Terra Nova'* could not easily be equalled, even by their wealthier peers. The Este were concerned about the cost of their numerous commissions and festivals but they strictly maintained a façade of nonchalance when expending large sums. It appeared that their income and generosity was limitless.

The Este, like their counterparts in Urbino, Mantua, Padua and Florence, used this impressive display of Magnificence to assert their social status -- after all, Aristotle had intended it for such a purpose. Borso, at first very uncertain of the security of his position, soon conceived of himself as a majestic ruler of a hierarchically structured society. This was demonstrated in the entry of 1453 and particularly in the Schifanoia frescoes. Yet, Borso lacked a true aristocratic touch; throughout his reign his confidence was impaired by the fact of his illegitimacy. He frequently mingled among his subjects (in the March fresco he is portrayed dispensing justice in the streets), courting their

favour, and he consistently sought the approval of his peers.

Ercole, too, propagated a view of himself as a grand and regal ruler through his Magnificence. During his public appearances his demeanor was formal and his dress rich. He was not as flamboyant as Borso, but his placidity and elegance were impressive. He also emphasized the subordinate position of the masses more discernably than did his predecessor. The sheer magnitude of his expenditures had a humbling effect upon his subjects. His Magnificence made them recognize the restrictions of their class; their seats in the Ferrarese theatre were exposed to the elements and their homes were not located in the new, luxurious quarters of the city.

It was Ercole's confidence, composure and sense of distance from the lower classes which distinguished him as an aristocratic ruler. His family had a long history, and a dynastic mythology linking it to the Carolingian monarchs. The artistic style of Este commissions, often patterned after that of the French courts, had long been aristocratic in nature.[1] However, Ercole with the assistance of Borso's political and artistic achievements, finally established the Este as a leading ruling family in Italy and Ferrara as a highly regarded cultural centre in Europe.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Gundersheimer, *Style of a Despotism*, pp. 229-271. Gundersheimer says of Ferrarese art that it is "the counterpart of the courtly ethos of perfect self-control and effortless excellence. It produces a result totally compatible with the values and interests of a small aristocratic elite - an art that is highly decorative, inventive, and sophisticated, and both intellectually and visually complex.... Iconographically, ...it is an art conceived by, and intended for, the learned and for those with whom the learned agree to share their secrets," (p. 234).

FIGURE I

Map of Italy in 1494

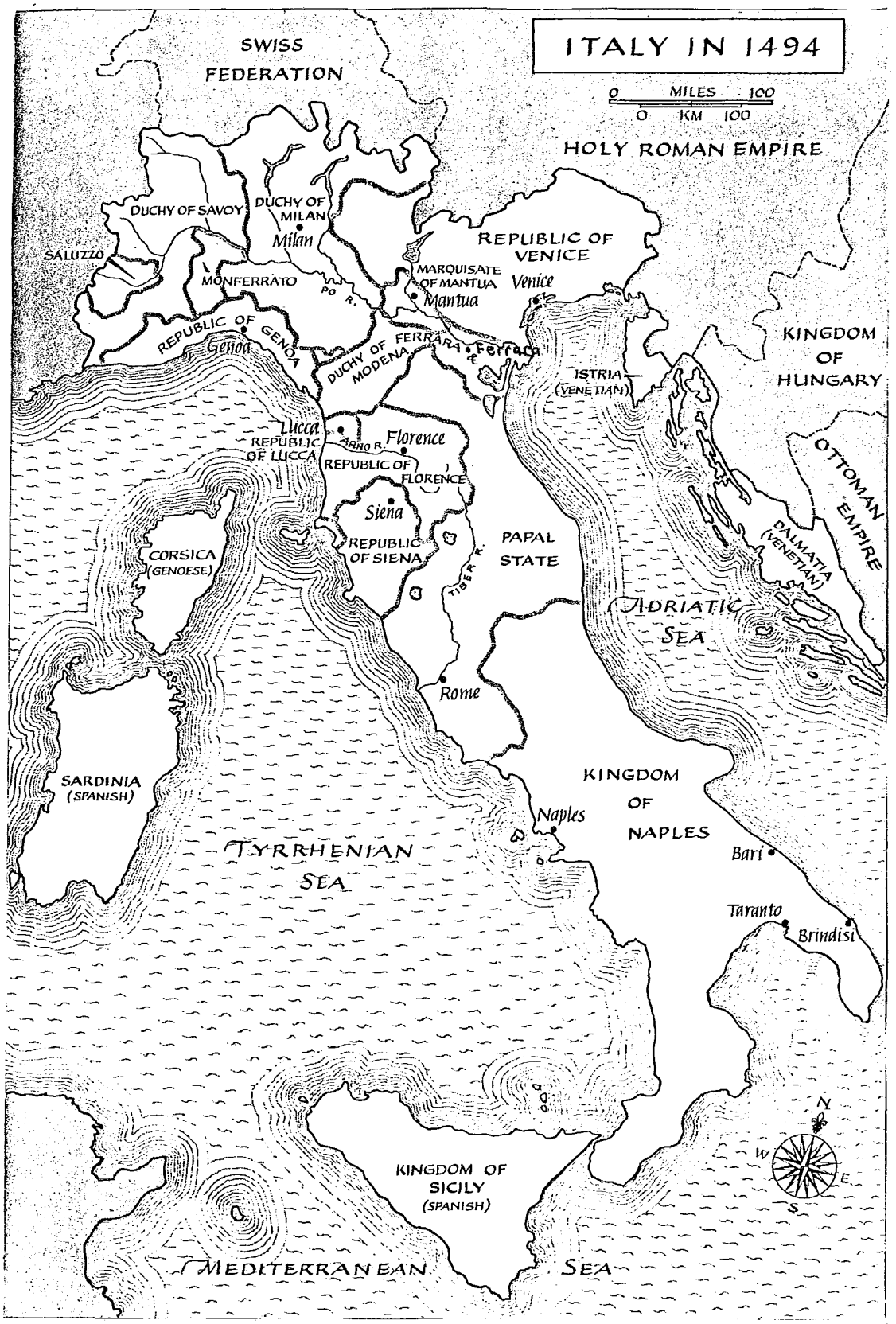

ITALY IN 1494
0 MILES 100
0 KM 100
SWISS FEDERATION
HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE
DUCHY OF SAVOY
DUCHY OF MILAN
Milan
SALUZZO
MONFERRATO
PO R.
REPUBLIC OF VENICE
MARQUISATE OF MANTUA
Mantua
Venice
REPUBLIC OF GENOA
Genoa
DUCHY OF MODENA
FERRARA
Ferrara
KINGDOM OF HUNGARY
ISTRIA (VENETIAN)
Lucca
REPUBLIC OF LUCCA
ARNO R.
Florence
REPUBLIC OF FLORENCE
OTTOMAN EMPIRE
Siena
REPUBLIC OF SIENA
PAPAL STATE
DALMATIA (VENETIAN)
CORSICA (GENOESE)
TIBER R.
ADRIATIC SEA
Rome
SARDINIA (SPANISH)
KINGDOM OF NAPLES
Naples
Bari
TYRRHENIAN SEA
Taranto
Brindisi
N
W
E
S
KINGDOM OF SICILY (SPANISH)
MEDITERRANEAN SEA

FIGURE 2

Engraving of the Monument to Borso d'Este

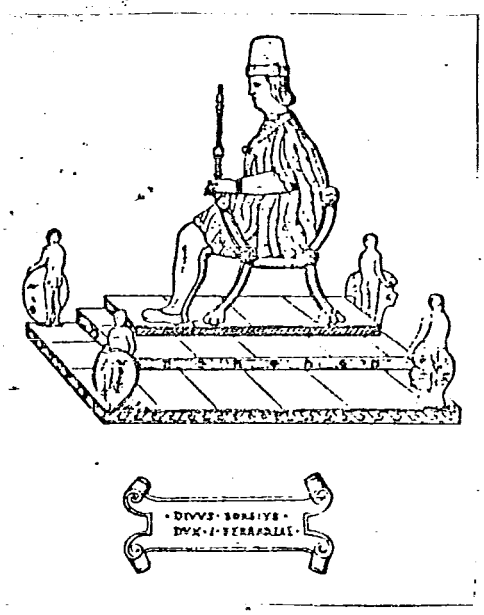
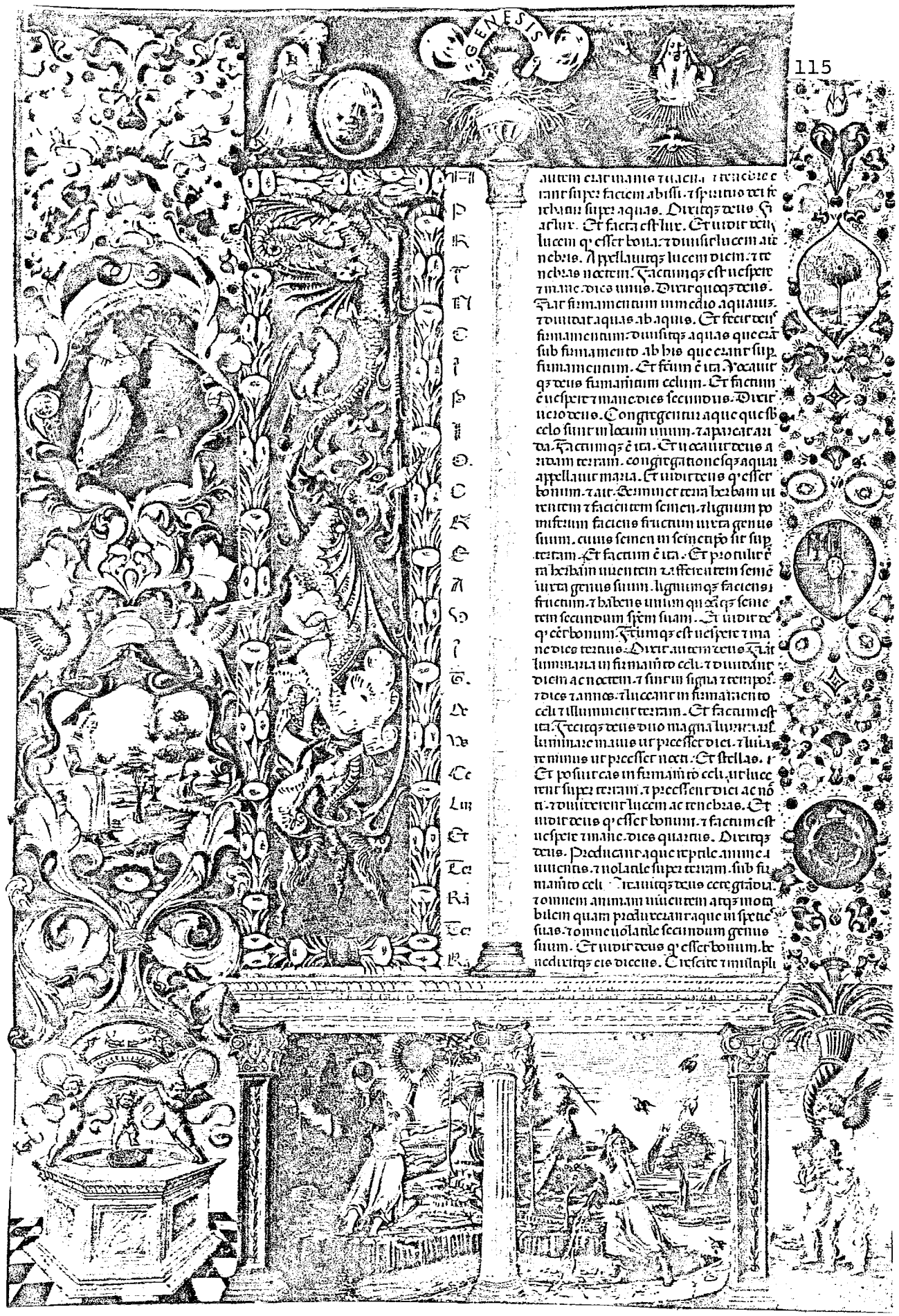


FIGURE 3

La Bibbia di Borso d'Este, I, fol. 5^{v}

Book of Genesis



PRINCIPIO CREAVIT DEVS CELVM ET TERRAM

autem erat inanis & vacua. & tenebre e
rant super faciem abissi. & spiritus dei fe
rebatur super aquas. Dixitq; deus. Fi
at lux. Et facta est lux. Et vidit deus
lucem q̃ esset bona. & divisit lucem a te
nebris. Appellavitq; lucem diem. & te
nebras noctem. Factumq; est vespere
& mane dies unus. Dixit quoq; deus.
Fiat firmamentum in medio aquarum
& dividat aquas ab aquis. Et fecit deus
firmamentum: divisitq; aquas que erant
sub firmamento ab his que erant super
firmamentum. Et factum est ita. Vocavit
q; deus firmamentum celum. Et factum
est vespere & mane dies secundus. Dixit
quoq; deus. Congregentur aque que sub
celo sunt in locum unum. & apparea
rida. Factumq; est ita. Et vocavit deus a
ridam terram. congregationesq; aquarum
appellavit maria. Et vidit deus q̃ esset
bonum. & ait. Germinet terra herbam vi
rentem & facientem semen. & lignum po
miferum faciens fructum iuxta genus
suum. cuius semen in semetipso sit super
terram. Et factum est ita. Et protulit
terra herbam virentem & facientem semen
iuxta genus suum. lignumq; faciens
fructum. & habens unumquodq; semen
secundum speciem suam. Et vidit deus
q̃ esset bonum. Factumq; est vespere & ma
ne dies tertius. Dixit autem deus. Fiant
luminaria in firmamento celi. & dividant
diem ac noctem. & sint in signa & tempo
ra dies & annos. & luceant in firmamento
celi & illuminent terram. Et factum est
ita. Fecitq; deus duo magna luminaria. lu
minare maius ut preesset diei. & lumi
nare minus ut preesset nocti. Et stellas. &
Et posuit eas in firmamento celi. ut lucerent
super terram. & preessent diei ac no
cti. & dividerent lucem ac tenebras. Et
vidit deus q̃ esset bonum. & factum est
vespere & mane dies quartus. Dixitq;
deus. Producant aque reptile anime
ntis & volatile super terram. sub fir
mamento celi. Creavitq; deus cete grandia.
& omnem animam viventem atq; motã
bilem quam produxerant aque in species
suas. & omne volatile secundum genus
suum. Et vidit deus q̃ esset bonum. be
nedixitq; eis dicens. Crescite & multipli

FIGURE 4

Façade of the Palazzo Schifanoia

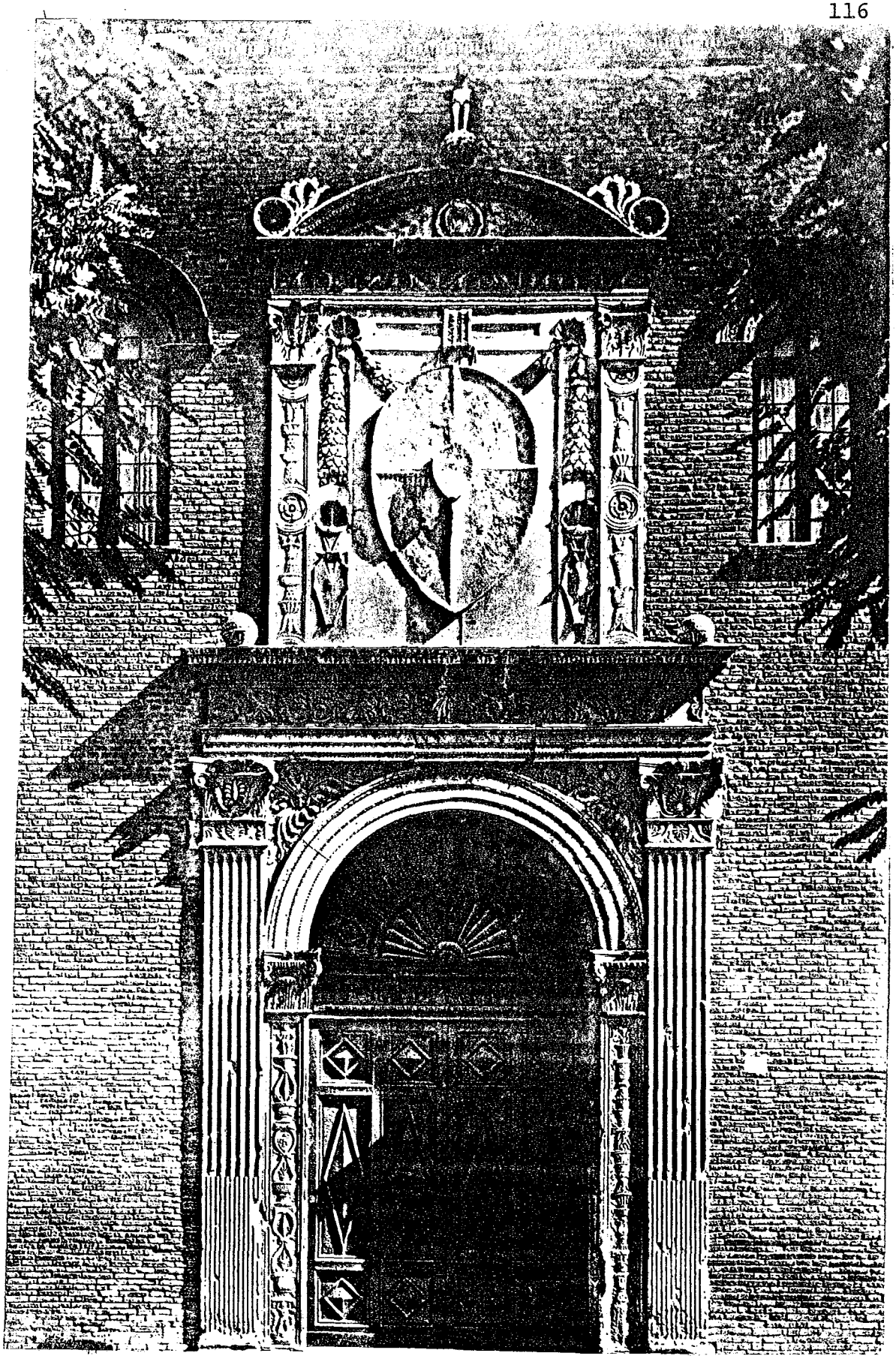


FIGURE 5

"March", *Sala dei mesi*

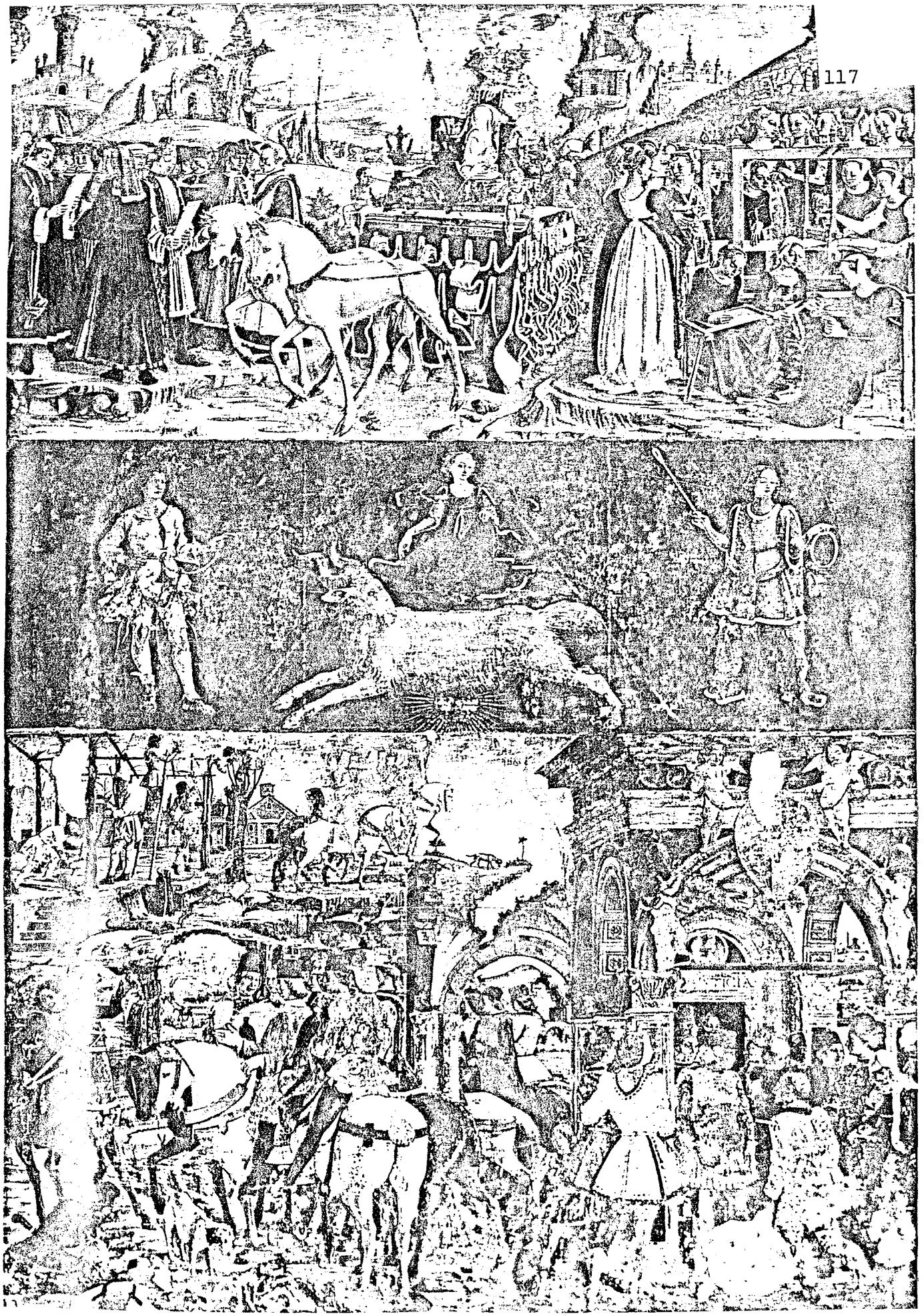


FIGURE 6

"April", *Sala dei mesi*

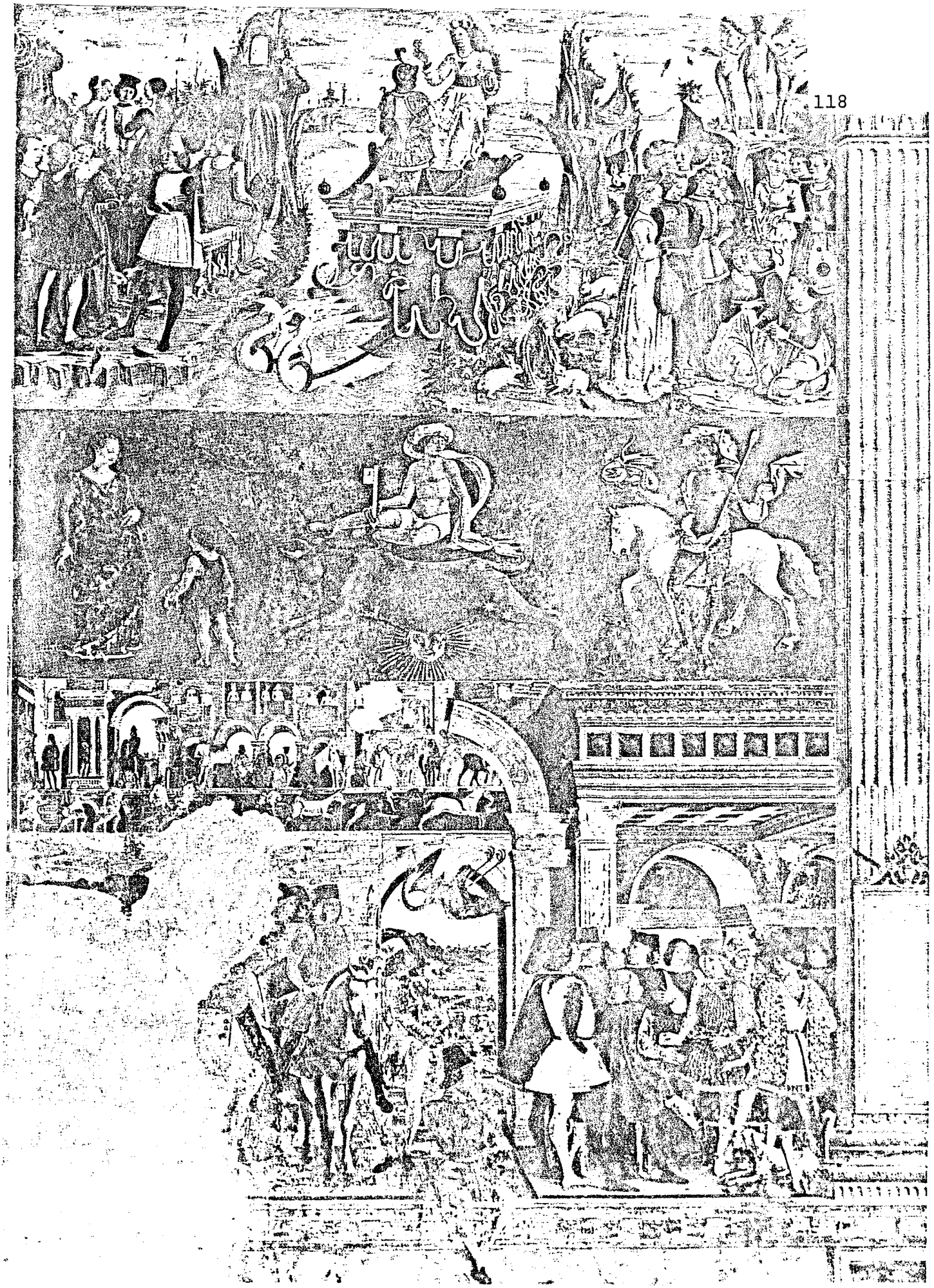
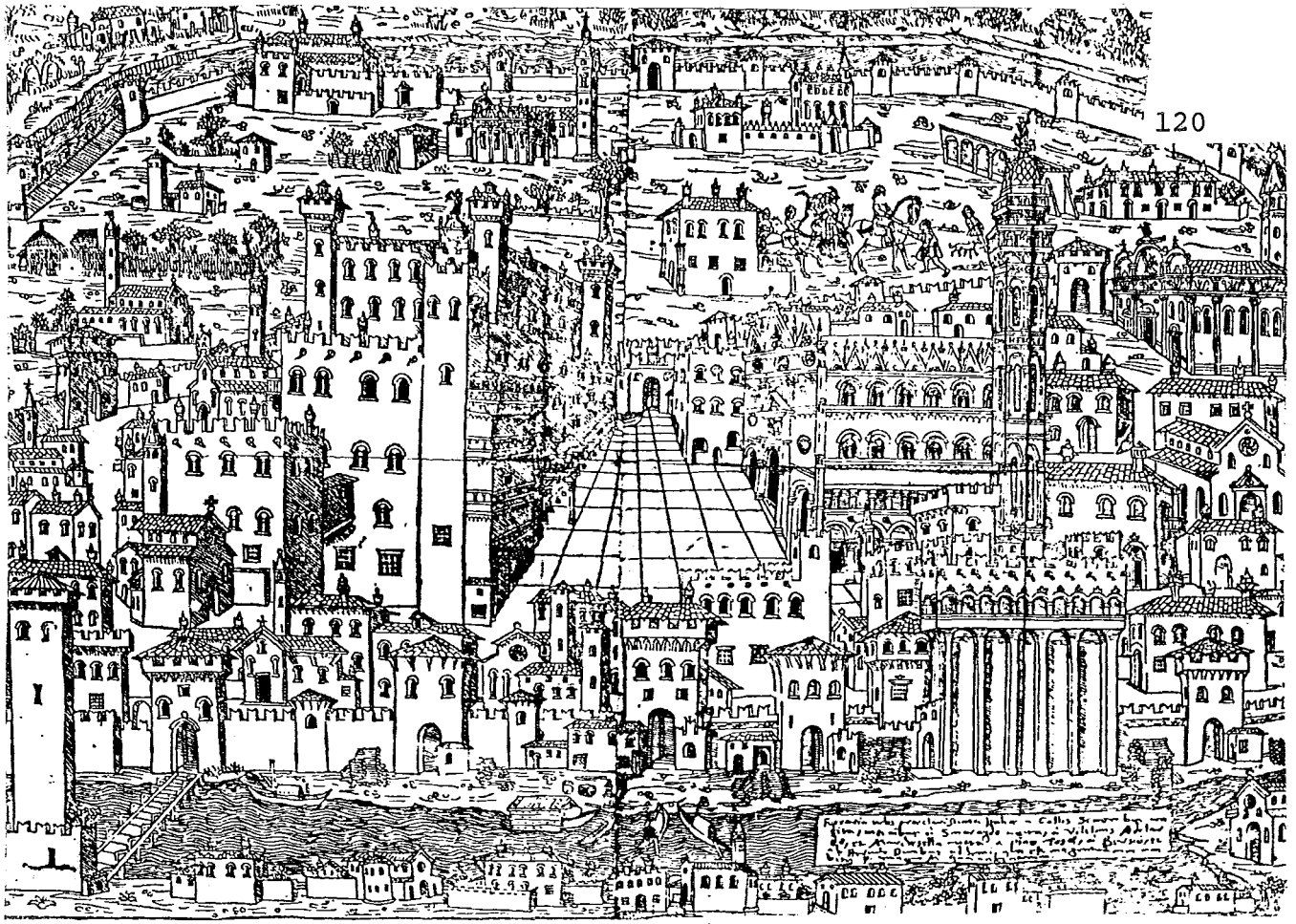


FIGURE 7

A group of riders (jousters) with penants from North Wall, *Sala dei mesi*



CITTA' DI FERRARA - TIPO DEL PRISCIANI

-1498-

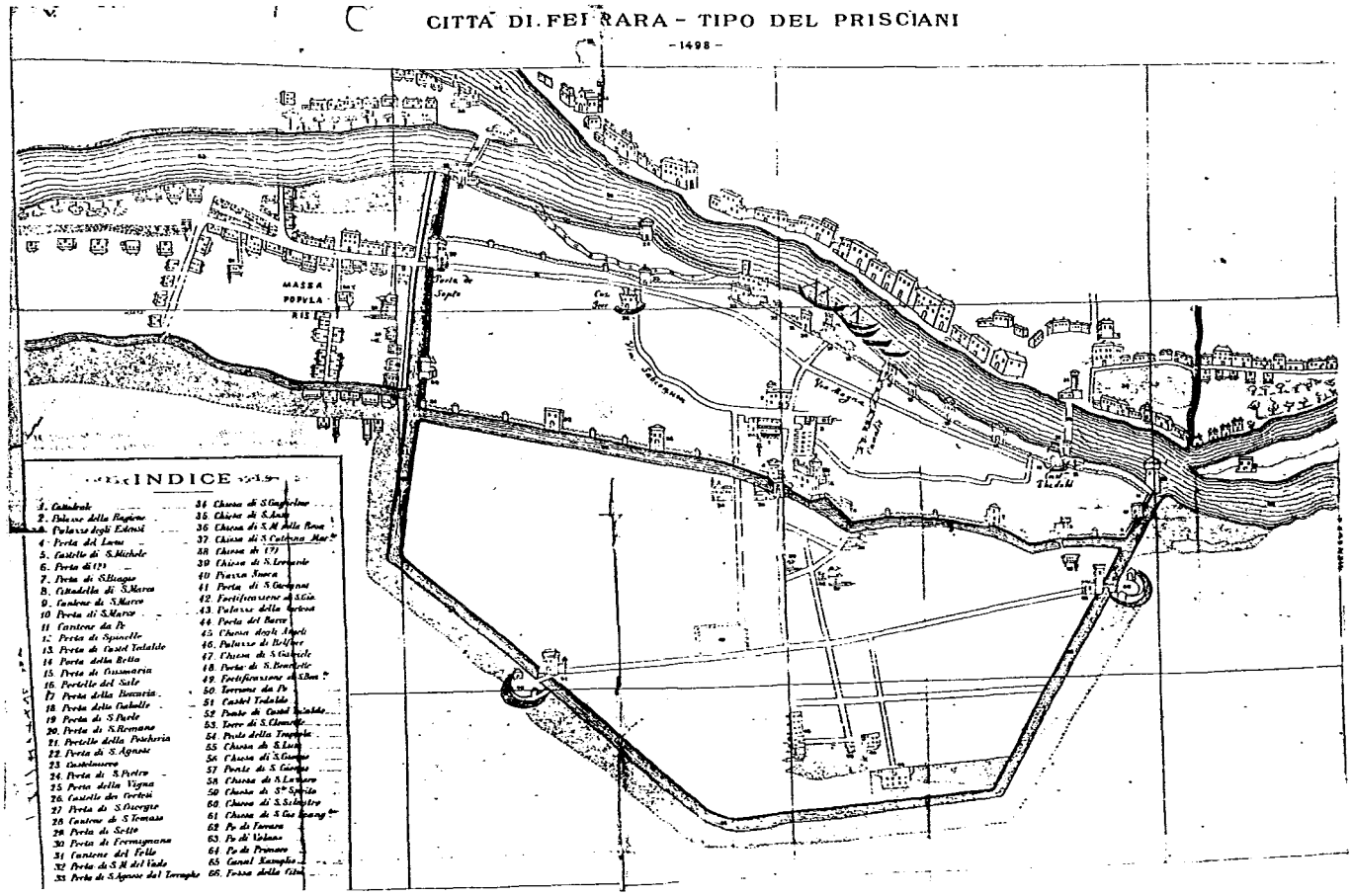
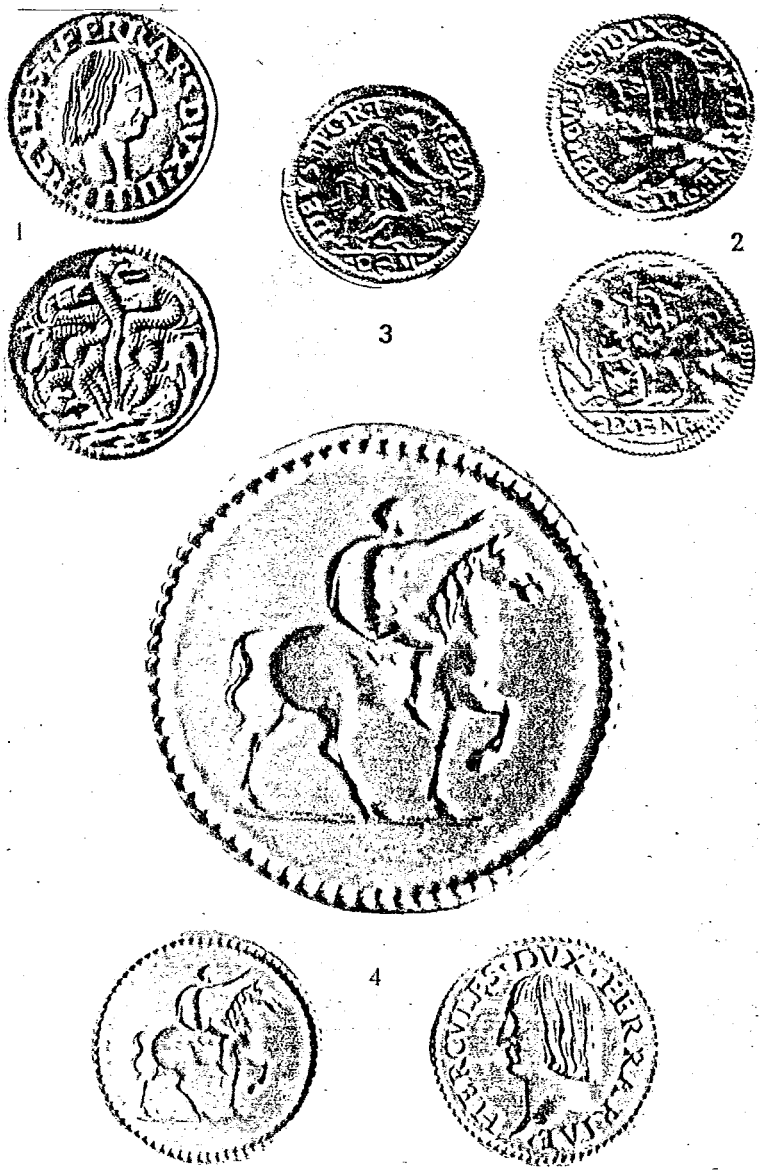


FIGURE 9

Coins of Ercole d'Este



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