Lucrezia Borgia as Entrepreneur[*]

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The financial status of patrician women in Renaissance Italy remains obscure in all but a few cases, but the prevailing paradigm frames them as being dedicated to the well-being of their families, subordinating their interests to those of their spouses. Where known, their financial activities consist for the most part of supervising small farms, marketing livestock and produce, buying and selling properties, and lending money at interest. Lucrezia Borgia confounds this paradigm: she was a budding capitalist entrepreneur, leveraging her own capital by obtaining marshland at negligible cost and then investing in massive reclamation enterprises. She also raised livestock and rented parts of her newly arable land for short terms, nearly doubling her annual income in the process.

1. INTRODUCTION

A few days after the death of Lucrezia Borgia, Duchess of Ferrara (1480–1519), from complications of childbirth, Giovanni Gonzaga wrote to their sister-in-law Isabella d'Este (1474–1539): "They say [that] the duchess left a good sum of money but only a few know how much."[1] Historians have elaborated on what contemporaries viewed as her great wealth at the time of her marriage in 1501, a spectacular dowry of gold and

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[1]Archivio di Stato Mantua (ASMa), Archivio Gonzaga (AG), Autografi, busta (b.) 4, 29 June 1519, Giovanni Gonzaga to Isabella d'Este: "Se dize la duchesa aver lasato dinari e in bon numero ma la quantita no se sa e questo e in pocha zente." The rest of the letter was written by a secretary, but this comment is appended in Gonzaga's own hand.

jewelry valued at 300,000 ducats, but the mystery to which Gonzaga alludes regarding her wealth has persisted to modern times. In most accounts her financial resources surface only once more, when it became necessary to pawn her jewelry to finance the 1509–13 wars with Pope Julius II and Venice.[2] Otherwise, scholars have simply ignored her financial circumstances. Her economic activities have been overshadowed by unfortunate and unfounded accusations of incest and the supposed poisoning of her second husband. The unkind allusions of Francesco Guicciardini in the sixteenth century, the nasty fiction of Victor Hugo in the nineteenth, and Alessandro Luzio's disparaging dismissal of her as a silly lightweight at the beginning of the twentieth, have eclipsed the more accurate, balanced depictions of Ferdinand Gregorovius and Maria Bellonci.[3]

Going beyond the approaches of earlier studies, this essay investigates her wealth, and asks what happened to her money following her marriage to Alfonso I d'Este (1476–1534) in 1501 and her elevation to Duchess of Ferrara in 1505. The scarcity of research on women's participation in finance and economics emerged in Joan Kelly's groundbreaking article "Did Women have a Renaissance?" which, as Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., observed in 1998, is concerned primarily with economics and status. Although research on domestic labor, domestic servants, prostitution, and certain middle-class women has appeared, historians have only recently begun to explore property records and notarial documents to assess women's acquisition of wealth and economic status.[4] As Cohn bluntly remarks, "The recent blossoming of women's history and gender studies of the Italian Renaissance have largely skirted questions of economics and women's participation in the work force."[5] Researchers have plumbed census materials and other sources in Venice and Florence for material about women's labor in general, with a tendency to emphasize the small scale and perceived marginality of female involvement in the world of work outside of the family; perhaps more importantly, their studies note the scarcity of available information.[6] For example, in the last decade research has begun to appear regarding some of the economic activities of the Medici women

[2]Archivio di Stato Ferrara (ASFe), Archivio Notarile Antico (ANA), notary matricola (m.) 283, Bartolomeo Codegori, pacco (p.) 26 (1510–11), 27 November 1510, "Mandatum Romano Tombesi."

[3]The sexual conduct of a woman was understood to be fundamental to her family; therefore, impugning a woman's honor was tantamount to disgracing the entire family: Guicciardini; Hugo; Romani; Luzio; Gregorovius; Bellonci.

[4]Kelly; Santore.

[5]Cohn, 1998, 107. Among other key texts on women's work, see Brown, 206–24.

[6]Cohn, 1980; Klapisch-Zuber; Romano.

in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and, more recently, on the ways patrician women in Central and Northern Italy financed their cultural activities.[7]

With some exceptions, however, dowries remain the focus of scholarly attention, with the corresponding perception of a woman's role in enhancing (or depleting) family wealth through marriage or monacation (becoming a nun).[8] On the most general level, women appear as vehicles for the transfer of wealth and the provision of heirs, at best as collaborators in their spouses' activities, and not as economic agents in their own right. For aristocratic women, the problem is even more acute: even if it has been easier to identify specific women within this class, their roles in finance and economics remain singularly obscure, overshadowed by those of their spouses unless they undertook patronage activities, an area where a growing body of research has emerged recently.[9] They tend to be seen as maneuvering on behalf of patriarchal family interests, the assumption being that they had none of their own.[10] Lucrezia Borgia presents quite a different case: it is not only what she did and how she did it, but the scale of her enterprises, that stands out.

Given the popular legends surrounding her name, it is no surprise that nineteenth-century scholars such as Ferdinand Gregorovius produced biographies of Lucrezia; subsequent biographies by Maria Bellonci and Sarah Bradford expand upon his research in much the same vein. The Lucrezia who emerges from these studies is neither a poisoner nor a murderess, nor the victim of (or participant in) incestuous relations with her father and brothers. Nonetheless, she remains a relatively passive figure, a pawn of her family's political games in Rome, and a faithful if often sickly wife in Ferrara without much independent character of her own. The purpose of this essay is less to rehabilitate Lucrezia than to illustrate,

[7]For the Medici women, see Tomas. Among other research that focuses on women, work, and money, see Groppi; for women involved in loaning money, see Ait. Interestingly enough, Lucrezia's own mother, Vannozza Cattanei, proved to be an enterprising woman beyond her ability to capture and sustain the attentions of Alexander VI. A shrewd money manager, Vannozza purchased, rented out, and sold properties in Rome on her own and managed to assemble a tidy bit of real estate in the environs of Campo dei Fiori: see Di Maggio. For an account of Borgia property activities more generally, see Esposito.

[8]Chojnacki.

[9]Among recent works that discuss patrician women's finances are McIver; Reiss and Wilkins; Eisenbichler. The titles alone indicate that it is still primarily the cultural activities that are of interest, although female finances do figure insofar as the women patronized the arts or, as in the case of Eleonora di Toledo, also supervised her own farm.

[10]Tomas, 14–43.

through her remarkable economic activities, the richly complicated life and activities of a prominent patrician woman long occluded by a misogynist tradition in historical studies. Unless a woman was married to an important political and cultural figure such as a Medici, or was herself a patron of the arts, such as Isabella d'Este and other lesser-known patrons, she appeared as an adjunct to her husband. Dismissed by many scholars unless considered in relation to her infamous relatives, Lucrezia was also ignored because, unlike her sister-in-law, she was neither an art and antiquities collector nor, with the exception of Pietro Bembo (1470–1547), did she carry on a correspondence with a major cultural or artistic figure.[11] The marked preference for cultural activities inevitably diminishes the significance of more mundane economic activities and leaves individuals such as Lucrezia vulnerable to charges such as that of Alessandro Luzio, who referred to her as a *stupida*.[12]

Contemporaries thought otherwise. They unanimously described her as a sharp businesswoman, more interested in taking care of business than in having fun.[13] Isabella d'Este's correspondent, known as El Prete, wrote, "She improves every day in my esteem; she is a very intelligent woman, astute, and you need to have your head on straight [to deal with her]. I regard her as a wise woman, and this is not my view alone, but that of the entire company."[14] Her subsequent economic activities confirm the accuracy of their assessments, and her actions at crucial moments in Ferrara's history suggest that she was profoundly knowledgeable about her new home and involved in governance. When Alfonso d'Este traveled to France for over two months at the end of 1518, Lucrezia was left to govern in his

[11]Her exchange of letters with Pietro Bembo appears in Raboni; Shankland. Bembo dedicated his masterwork, *Gli Asolani*, to her in 1504: see Clough. For her contributions to sixteenth-century music, see Prizer. Never as involved with the world of collecting and artistic patronage as Isabella, Lucrezia nonetheless sponsored publications and hired artists, including Benvenuto Tisi da Garofalo, to decorate her quarters. For the books, see Samaritani, 1981; Samaritani, 2004, 131–40; Zarri, 2006, 86–99.

[12]Cited in Luzio and Renier, vii.

[13]Archivio di Stato, Modena (ASMo), Cancelleria Ducale Estense (CDE), Dispacci degli ambasciatori da Roma, anno 1501, b. 10: Gianluca Pozzi wrote to Ercole I d'Este on 23 December 1501 extolling Lucrezia's prudence; he and Gerardo Saraceno also wrote on 8 December 1501: "The duchess seems most prudent and more inclined to handle current business than to have fun. I found her an agreeable woman with an excellent way of thinking."

[14]Cited in Luzio, 75 (El Prete to Isabella d'Este, 17 January 1502): "Ogni di la me reesce melgio ed e donna di gran cervello, astuta, bisogna aver la mente a casa. In fine io l'o per una savia madona, non mio solo parere ma de tutta questa compagnia."

stead; as Bernardino de' Prosperi reported, she did quite well.[15] I argue here that Lucrezia Borgia undertook economic activities independently and in her own interests. Her entrepreneurial activities have escaped attention because they do not fall within the constructed paradigm of female patricians in Renaissance Italy, in which women used their resources, and subordinated their own interests, on behalf of their families.

In the last three years, Antonio Samaritani and Gabriella Zarri have completed parallel studies of Lucrezia Borgia's spirituality.[16] The evidence they present from her actions, her letters, and the letters of her confessor, reveals an unexpectedly deep spirituality and religious commitment. Spirituality is a difficult topic to explore because of its highly personal character: nevertheless, the surviving documents they uncovered, and those cited here, reveal Lucrezia Borgia as a woman who maneuvered both within (religion) and without (entrepreneurship) the conventions of her time. No other woman of the early sixteenth century whose economic life has been unveiled in recent scholarship operated on the scale, or with the boldness, of Lucrezia Borgia.

As it turns out, venturing into this noblewoman's patrimony is complicated by the paucity of primary sources. By comparison with Isabella d'Este, relatively few of Lucrezia's letters exist, and only a handful of her account registers survive.[17] In 1945, Ferrara's Palazzo di Giustizia went up in flames, and with it, nearly six hundred years of legal documents and

[15]ASMa, AG, b. 1246, f. xxix, 663, Bernardino de' Prosperi to Isabella d'Este, 16 December 1518: "The affairs of government are proceeding in the way I wrote to you [earlier], and the Signora Duchess does not lack courage and [conducts] the examination of accounts every day of one sort or another, to the great satisfaction of the troops."

[16]Samaritani, 2004; Zarri, 2006. Like her economic life, her religious activities have been ignored for hundreds of years, despite archival evidence and the observations of her contemporaries. In general, only ecclesiastical researchers studied women and their religious lives. Zarri, 1990, opens this extraordinarily rich vein of research, one still undergoing enormous expansion today.

[17]Some of her correspondence can be found in ASMo, Archivio Estense (AE), Casa e Stato (C & S), *Carteggio tra principi estensi*, Letters of Lucrezia Borgia Estense (Letters), 1500–19, b. 141; another large repository of her letters, those to Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga, are at ASMa, AG, Autografi, 84, Lettere di Lucrezia Borgia, b. 1, 2, 3, 4; Serie EXXX1, 2, b. 1189. Letters to intimates are usually in her own hand, while official letters of all sorts were transcribed by secretaries; the same is true of Isabella, whose relentless collecting is documented primarily in the *copielettere*, the copies of her letters written by her secretaries. No one has ever seriously maintained that these letters were only drafted in Isabella's name, perhaps because many of them concerned collecting and minor financial matters; scholars have a much more difficult time accepting that Lucrezia Borgia was equally directly involved when her secretaries penned her letters.

property transactions. At the Archivio di Stato in Ferrara, all that remains of property transaction records is in the Archivio Notarile Antico, an uninventoried repository of notaries' notebooks.[18] The Archivio di Stato, Modena, holds eight registers of her financial transactions and household expenses, along with two wardrobe inventories, a notebook kept by her Maestro di Casa, and one inventory of her jewelry.[19] No will has been located, although she made one.[20] Despite the huge lacunae, a careful review of these materials along with extensive research in the Archivio Notarile Antico have made it possible to identify Lucrezia Borgia as an ambitious entrepreneur in the second decade of the sixteenth century, one who pursued the enhancement of her patrimony with dogged persistence and on a staggeringly large scale, with an approach quite distinct from that of her husband. She did not do so by using her dotal cash of 200,000 gold ducats, but by shrewdly investing at least two bequests of significant sums of cash and jewelry, supplemented by her annual stipend from the Ducal Chamber and her own jewelry.[21]

[18]ASFe, ANA, m. 493, Battista Saracco, p. 31s, (1504–56). In the sixteenth century, seventeen documents regarding Lucrezia's property acquisitions were assembled in this file; I have uncovered an additional thirty-six documents relating to, or recording, other transactions relating to her property, as well as previously unknown and unpublished letters. Some of the notary records transcribed by Saracco have been partially transcribed or translated in Cazzola and Folchi.

[19]The records for her household and business activities of interest for this study are in ASMo, AE, Amministrazione dei Principi, Lucrezia Borgia (AP, LB), b. 1130, Memoriale 1506; b. 1131, Memoriale 1507–1509; b. 1132, Memoriale 1517–1519; b. 1133, Giornali di dare e avere 1506; b. 1134, Libro di entrate et uscite (a notebook maintained by her *seschalco* [seneschal], Michele Rolla, 1514–1519; b. 1135, Autenticho 1508; b. 1136, Autenticho 1518; b. 1136bis, Conto generale 1519; b. 1137, Inventario di Guardaroba 1502–1503; b. 1138, Vacchetta di Guardaroba 1506–1509; b. 1139, Inventario di gioie e altra roba 1516–1519.

[20]Lucrezia's will was notarized by the ducal notary Obizzo Remo on 11 July 1519, but no copy exists in either the archives in Modena or in Ferrara. Reference to the will appears in a subsequent document in which she passed on her interest in Brancole and Donegate to two of her sons, Ercole II and Ippolito II d'Este: ASFe, ANA, m. 493, Saracco, p. 31s, "Innovatio pro Illustrissimus dominus haeridibus olim illustrissimae dominae Lucretiae ducisse Ferrariae," 8 November 1519. Samaritani, 1981, 1002, alludes to a persistent rumor that Alfonso refused to follow the terms of Lucrezia's will because she left too many pious bequests. He cites de'Prosperi's comment in a letter to Isabella d'Este on 29 June 1519 that, "As far as one knows, Signore Alfonso is right to see this as monkish doings," but like subsequent scholars, Samaritani could not locate the will or any documentation for the rumor that Alfonso decided to ignore it. The original is among Bernardino de' Prosperi's numerous letters to Isabella d'Este, ASMa, AG, b. 1245, f. viii, sf. 110.

[21]Rodrigo d'Aragona, Duca di Bisceglie, was the legitimate son of her second marriage

The few financial registers that antedate 1513 reveal Lucrezia conducting her financial affairs much as her late mother-in-law, Eleonora d'Aragona (1450–93), had done in the late fifteenth century: they record donations to convents and expenses for clothing, jewelry, paintings, gifts, and the decoration of her private quarters. She also assisted her husband in the supervision of his properties and their common quarters.[22] Additionally, like Eleonora, Lucrezia provided advice and support to her spouse during wartime.[23] At 60,000 ducats plus another 20,000 in goods, Eleonora's dowry was significantly smaller than that of Lucrezia, but she seems to have been able to count on easy access to her husband's purse. The situation for Lucrezia was quite different. Like other Renaissance brides, she consigned the cash part of her dowry (200,000 gold ducats) to her father-in-law Ercole I d'Este (1431–1505), while keeping her jewelry (then valued at 100,000 gold ducats), books, and clothing, as well as jewelry bestowed on her as the new Este bride. This arrangement left open the specifics of the allowance she was to receive to maintain her court. After a protracted struggle with Ercole regarding the size of her allowance from the Ducal Chamber, they finally settled on an annual subsidy of 6,000 ducats in cash and 6,000 in goods, such as food for the sustenance of her 120-member court; expenses beyond this were her responsibility.[24] Notably, she prevailed, having asked for an annual stipend of 12,000 ducats. At least until the outbreak of war in 1509, this sum appears to have remained constant.[25] Like other noble women, in the first years of her marriage she pawned pieces of jewelry and bolts of luxury cloth to sustain additional

to Alfonso d'Aragona. When Rodrigo died at the age of twelve in August 1512, Lucrezia was his only heir. She initiated proceedings to claim her inheritance on 29 October 1512: ASFe, ANA, m. 493, Saracco, p. 31s, 29 October 1512.

[22]See Chiappini, 16–19, 23–27. Much remains to be written on Eleonora, who, while recognized as having played a fundamental role in ruling Ferrara at the end of the Quattrocento, has also been largely ignored by historians.

[23]Eleonora frequently took control of the state during the war with Venice from 1482 to 1484, while Lucrezia served as a conduit and advisor during the war with Pope Julius and with Venice from 1509 to 1513: see Chiappini, 45–48. Lucrezia's letters to Alfonso during the war years illustrate her intense involvement in affairs of state: ASMo, AE, C & S, b. 141; see also Mazzi, 142; Bradford, 290–323.

[24]Ercole wrote to Isabella on 16 May 1502 to ask about her allowance and expenses; on 18 May Isabella responded, listing her total annual expenses as 10,500 ducats. The exchange of letters between Ercole and Isabella is reproduced in Prizer, 32; see also Laureati, 45.

[25]Lucrezia's subsidy came directly from the *boccatico* tax, a highly unpopular head tax instituted in the early fifteenth century on rural residents of the duchy.

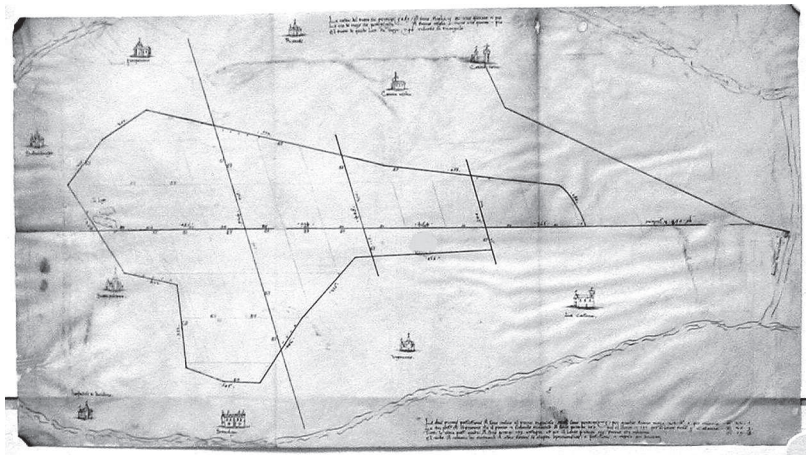


FIGURE 1. Map of Diamantina, 1513. The Canal Bianco runs east-west through Diamantina, and the secondary channels cross it. ASMo, Mappario Estense, Topografia dei Territori, n. 21; authorization n. 490/28.13.10/1, 6 March 2007.

expenses; in some cases she simply liquidated assets, as when she provided her cousin, Angela Borgia, with a dowry of 7,400 gold ducats in 1506.[26]

The years of war with the papacy and with Venice from 1509 to 1513 seem to have constituted a watershed in Lucrezia's economic life.[27] Prior to the war there are no traces of income other than from pawning goods or the subsidy from the Ducal Chamber, but within months of the death of Pope Julius II in 1513, Lucrezia had initiated an ambitious program only terminated by her death six years later. In September 1513, notaries drafted an agreement between Lucrezia and her husband's cousin, Don Ercole, son of Sigismondo d'Este, in which he donates one-half of his holdings in Diamantina — a large, marshy district directly to the west of Ferrara — to Lucrezia in exchange for her agreement to undertake on the lands a major reclamation project that included erecting embankments and digging canals (Fig. 1). Don Ercole's father began to assemble property in Diamantina in 1498 and Ercole started reclamation work in 1506, but by 1513 he had concluded that he lacked the economic resources to finish the job: "Most illustrious Lord Hercules Estense gives, donates and consigns to the Most illustrious . . . Lucrezia Borgia d'Este, Duchess of Ferrara here present etc. . . . an undivided one-half interest of each and every possession,

[26]ASFe, ANA m. 283, Bartolomeo Codegori, p. 9, f. 1506, carte (cc.) 275^{r}–276^{r}, "Dote Angela Borgia," 5 December 1506: the dowry went to Alessandro Pio di Sassuolo.

[27]The hostilities with Pope Julius II terminated with his death in 1513; those with Venice only in 1516.

land, field, pasture, *valli*, and real estate (in Diamantina) . . . to cause to make according to the standards of honorable men at the expense of the aforesaid Duchess the extension of the existing Canal called the Naviglio to the polesine of Ferrara and all other conduits and channels necessary to drain the waters of that real estate at Diamantina and the nearby waters and all other waters near that real estate."[28] In exchange for funding the incomplete reclamation project and then operating the new property, Lucrezia received title to one-half of Diamantina; Ercole, on the other hand, would see the value and productivity of his half of the land increase because of the completion of the hydraulic works.

Precisely why Lucrezia began to pursue reclamation projects on a grand scale is not clear; certainly she owned large numbers of horses, cattle, milk cows, and sheep during these years, and the land was partly intended to provide pasture for her livestock. There is no evidence that she owned either land or livestock before 1513, although it is likely that she did, because most noblewomen in the Po Delta did own livestock or land, or both. No particular agricultural crisis spurred her activities; despite the war, no serious grain shortages or livestock losses appear to have occurred.[29] The unexpected arrival of a substantial inheritance from Lucrezia's son and another bequest of jewelry from the Bishop of Massa Marittima, Don Venura Benassi, appear to have coincided with her desire to solidify her

[28]Donation from Don Ercole d'Este to Lucrezia Borgia, 26 September 1513, ASFe, ANA, m. 390, Nicola Gillini, pacco 12s, 1508–15; agreement between Ercole d'Este and Lucrezia Borgia, 26 September 1513, ASFe, ANA m. 283, Bartolomeo Codegori, p. 27s, 1512–13; also transcribed in Bondanini, 53–58. Bondanini, 47–48, notes that Ercole Estense (also referred to as Ercole d'Este di Sigismondo) ran short of funds, but it is also implicit in the pact, because he gave up one-half of his holdings in exchange for her completing the reclamation project entirely at her expense; she would also then be in charge of operating Diamantina: "Illustrissimus dominus dominus Hercules Estensis fq. . . . dedit, donavit et tradidit Illustrissimae . . . Lucreciae Borgiae Estensi Ducissae Ferrariae presenti etc. . . . dimidiam pro indiviso omnium et singularum possessionum, terrarum, pratorum, pascuorum, vallium . . . facere arbitrio boni viri omnibus sumptibus et expensis praefatae dominae Ducissae Navillum seu canale vocatum el navilio existens et se extendens per policinum Ferrariae et omnem alium conductum necessarium pro scolando acquas ex dictis bonis Diamantinae ut sunt acquae vicinorum et omnes alias aquas propter quas dicta bona."

[29]As was the case elsewhere in Italy, food supplies could be irregular depending upon variables such as climate and flooding, but Ferrara's rulers employed the same expedients others did: that is, seeking to supplement shortages by purchasing stores from elsewhere in Italy, such as grain from Puglia. In 1504, for example, Lucrezia wrote to Francesco Gonzaga requesting grains because of the severe shortages in the duchy: ASMa, AG, Copia lettere di Francesco II, b. 2912, libro 184, c. 29, 6 October 1504, Lucrezia Borgia to Francesco Gonzaga. There is no evidence of similar requests between 1513 and 1519, except for provisions for the ducal court itself.

patrimony, possibly because of the severe cash shortages the duchy suffered during the war and the consequent need to pawn substantial amounts of her jewelry and possibly reduce her annual subsidy.[30] The value of the jewelry she inherited is not recorded, nor is the total amount of her son's estate, but the first installment of the latter amounted to 3,425 gold ducats, or 10,960 lire marchesane, which she received in February 1514; the jewelry arrived a month later.[31] The sum's significance registers best by comparison with the total income of the entire Duchy of Ferrara in 1510, which was 259,865 lire marchesane: four percent, or one twenty-fifth, of the total.[32]

During her last six years, Lucrezia also began a concerted campaign both to redeem jewelry pawned or loaned in earlier years and to collect other debts. Sometime before his murder, Ercole Strozzi (1473–1508) received a conspicuous group of jewels from Lucrezia, which she struggled to reclaim from his relatives.[33] In Rome, the Apostolic Chamber owed her 1,000 ducats and the banker Julio Spanochio owed her another 2,000; she was also seeking to recover the estate of a deceased brother, Juan, Duke of

[30]By February 1514 she had received the part of the inheritance of Rodrigo d'Aragona, Duke of Bisceglie, that was in the hands of Isabella d'Aragona, his guardian, a sum of 3,425 gold ducats, and six grains of gold, in addition to tapestries, livestock, and other properties: ASFe, ANA, m. 493, Saracco, b. 31s, "Confessione," 16 February 1514. The struggle to acquire the remainder of Rodrigo's inheritance continued until her death in 1519. The second inheritance came from Benassi through his sister, with no indication of the jewelry's value: ASFe, ANA, m. 493, Saracco, p. 31s, 14 March 1514, "Confessione"; for partial transcriptions, see Cazzola and Folchi.

[31]The lira marchesana originated with the *marchese* (marquis) of Ferrara Nicolò lo Zoppo in 1382, and was abolished by the papacy in 1659. The lira marchesana was an accounting convenience and not a coin in circulation; instead, silver soldi, also known as marchesini, and dinari (or denari) were the normal currencies. One lira equaled twenty soldi; twelve denari equaled one soldo. Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was divided into multiple principalities and states, many of which had their own systems of coinage; Ferrara's lira marchesana was less stable than the Venetian gold ducat. For monetary systems in Ferrara, see Sitta, especially 10–14; for more general information about money and measurements elsewhere in Italy, see Martini.

[32]Sitta, 48. Although the total amount of Rodrigo's estate is not certain, an Este ambassador in Rome put the amount outstanding in Valencia, Spain, at 9,000 ducats: ASMo, AE, Archivio Segreto Estense, Cancelleria (Cancelleria), Ambasciatori, Roma, b. 10, f. 165, 17 March 1518, Girolamo Naselli.

[33]ASFe, ANA, m. 418, Deodato Bellaia, p. 11, f. 1519, 22 January 1519. Lucrezia loaned the jewels to Ercole Strozzi at least eleven or twelve years earlier, along with 1,000 lire marchesane, although the document does not specify precisely when. The jewelry consisted of four gold pieces, each with precious stones such as emeralds, pearls, rubies, and diamonds, too little to have been the 85,000 ducats worth of jewels and 2,500 ducats in cash that Alfonso consigned to the brothers Guido, Ercole, and Lorenzo Strozzi on 14 May 1506, evidently for the purpose of pawning them: ASFe, Archivio Bentivoglio, b. 22, n. 4.

Gandia, in Siena.[34] Along with her son's and brother's inheritances, both known to her by 1513, she was also cognizant of the reclamation activities of Don Ercole d'Este and of other members of the court. One of her obstetricians and very close friends, Francesco da Castello — court physician, bon vivant, ducal hunting companion, and humanist — grew rich in the years prior to the war precisely by acquiring property, draining marshes for pasture, and amassing rental income.[35] While his resources were modest by comparison with Lucrezia's, his actions demonstrated how to invest one's resources and increase one's patrimony through reclamation. Nonetheless, just as the presence of advisors, counselors, and court favorites has not diminished the luster of princes, no more should it do so for Lucrezia Borgia.

Because Lucrezia's account books for the years 1509 to 1517 have not survived, precisely what funds she used to begin reclaiming Diamantina is not known with certainty. No evidence suggests that she used part of her dowry, a type of economic activity known as usufruct. Quite the contrary: that she promptly spent nearly one quarter of the first installment of her son's inheritance in 1514 on livestock indicates that the unexpected bequests funded her entrepreneurial activities.[36] Much of the remainder

[34]ASMo, AE, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Rome, b. 10, f. 165, 17 March 1518, Girolamo Naselli, memoriale.

[35]Francesco da Castello (d. 1511) is another court figure who has attracted little attention from historians, but who played a major role in the last years of Ercole I's reign and in the early years of Alfonso's. Da Castello was also a collector of manuscripts and the builder of the palace now known as Palazzo Prosperi-Sacrati, famed for the portal with its entablature held aloft by putti. He commissioned the palace in the newly enlarged part of the city across the street from Sigismondo d'Este's Palazzo dei Diamanti: ASFe, ANA, m. 224, Gregorio Castelli, p. 1, c. 20, cited in Franceschini, 599–600. The correspondence between da Castello and Isabella d'Este regarding his manuscript collection is cited in Luzio and Renier, 35–36. Da Castello was also a shrewd businessman who acquired great wealth, including properties at La Redena that were still owned by his descendants in the eighteenth century. There is evidence that da Castello and the duchess planned the reclamation of the *serraglio* (low-lying marshland enclosed within embankments) at La Redena sometime before 1511, but Francesco's death and the war interrupted this program. Lucrezia's ledgers in 1518 record a contract between Lucrezia and Francesco da Castello for reclamation activities at La Redena; since he was not described as the late Francesco da Castello, the contract may have antedated his death in 1511.

[36]For the livestock purchase, see ASFe, ANA, m. 283, Bartolomeo Codegori, p. 14 (1514), undated and loose document infra c. 201, for the purchase of eighty-two milk cows and calves, sixty-two cattle, a horse, and half interest in another fifty-nine cattle. The opening lines specify the source of the funds: "An account of the milk cows purchased on behalf of our most illustrious signora with the money brought from Bari," Bari being the city where Rodrigo d'Aragona had lived.

probably went to the hydraulic works: at San Senese, for example, she promised to invest 400 ducats in canal construction and wetland drainage over a period of five years. She could just as easily have purchased jewelry, property in the city, or existing and already prosperous agricultural land, but her entire relentless program of land acquisition and reclamation demonstrates that she avoided these easier strategies.[37]

Within three months of the accord with Ercole d'Este, Lucrezia also acquired property in Ariano, followed the next month by the acquisition of Brancole and Donegate, adjacent to Comacchio, and, in February 1515, land in Conselice and Argenta. The holdings she assembled over six years spanned the duchy, totaling between 13,000 and 25,000 hectares.[38] By the time of her death, the records document major reclamation activities such as excavating conduits, channels, and canals; installing sluice gates; erecting embankments; and planting contemporaneously at Diamantina, Redena, Ariano, and Sammartina while work was also underway at her other holdings.[39] So intense was the pace that within days of receiving title to a property, she sent her agents to claim it in person and start work.[40] Along

[37]I have located only one reference to property she owned in the city, a *chiuso* (a one-story, tile-roofed brick house) in the Addizione Erculea (then known as the Terranova) rented to her cook: ASMo, Camera Ducale Estense (CDE), Inventory of Feudi, b. 162, c. 106.

[38]Only a few of her contracts define the size of the property; most simply refer to them by name and, in other cases, by reference to adjoining properties. The estimate of a low of 13,000 hectares (1 hectare = 2.471 acres) and a high of 25,000 is based upon the known sizes (Diamantina, Brancole, and Donegate, which totaled about 6,000 hectares), and Sammartina, which included about 3,600 hectares already owned by the Este, to which she added the other half she received in donation; although it is possible that she controlled all of Sammartina, I have conservatively estimated its size at 4,000 hectares. Calculations for the others are based upon estimates as suggested in subsequent maps, the earliest of which dates from the second half of the sixteenth century. The *valli* of Marrara and Ariano were enormous, for example, but even a cautious calculation of about 4,000 hectares each already brings a conservative estimate for the total of her properties to more than 18,000 hectares.

[39]In 1518, for example, one Daniele de Fino was paid to demarcate boundaries between her land and that of the men of Ariano, and "to make the conduits for the reclamation of these lands": 21 April 1518, ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1136, c. lxxv.

[40]So eager was she to initiate work after acquiring Marrara from the Abbey of San Bartolo that, eight days after reaching the accord, she sent two retainers to take possession of the property, on which her records specify that she planned to start the improvements: ASMo, AE, b. 1136, c. lxxvii, 30 April 1518. The day after signing the agreement with Don Ercole d'Este for Diamantina, Lucrezia promised to spend 400 ducats over the next five years to excavate canals and construct the embankments in another property known as San Senese near Ficarolo: ASFe, ANA, m. 283, Codegori, p. 27s, 27 September 1513. The remainder of the document has been transcribed in Bondanini, 57–58.

with the hydraulic activities, she erected worker housing, stables, hay barns, cheese-houses, brickworks, and other farm buildings on her properties.[41] By mid-1514 the main features of her enterprises were clear. She sought out swamps and marshland, of which the duchy had an abundance: marginal land under water most of the year and useful for grazing only during the summer months, if at all. Instead of investing her cash in acquiring property, she received most of the land as donations, either from individuals or from town councils. In most cases, she agreed to undertake major reclamation projects in exchange for the properties. Finally, she used the newly acquired land for pasture for her livestock, for rental income, and for commercial agricultural production.

2. The Marshes of the Po Delta

The Duchy of Ferrara is located in the Po Delta, which until the early twentieth century included vast tracts that were under water most or all of the year. Over centuries parts had been reclaimed, but always slowly and in small amounts. A modest fishing industry thrived in the swamps at Diamantina and elsewhere in the duchy during the sixteenth century, and the terrain was ideal for pasturing water buffaloes; otherwise, it was largely useless as a source of revenue, and the receipts from fishing and water buffaloes paled by comparison with the potential income from arable land.

In the early modern period the entire Po Valley demanded significant hydraulic works, primarily to protect existing farmland from the constant threat of floods from the Reno, Po, and other rivers; and secondarily to transform extensive wetlands into productive new farmland. The Visconti and Sforza led campaigns in the late fifteenth century to drain swamps in Lombardy, while Venice continued its dramatic efforts to control the waters of the lagoon and prevent its canals from silting up.[42] Residents of the Po Delta in the early sixteenth century fought constant battles to prevent rivers and channels from overflowing into previously-drained land. The reclamation of Diamantina and Sammartina in the early sixteenth century has been described as transitional, occupying a space between medieval models and the massive capital projects of the second half of the sixteenth century. In previous centuries, reclamation was small-scale and

[41]At La Redena, for example, she erected a 32 x 8m hay barn, large stables for her milk cows, and a cheese-house to process milk from sheep, cows, and (probably) her water buffaloes: Ghiradro, 2004; ASMo, AP, LB, b. 1132, c. 35^{r}: "house in the courtyard" and "large haybarn"; c. 47^{r}: "wooden house"; b. 1136, c. 127^{r}: "building expenses in the houses in the said redena."

[42]For Lombardy, see Serpieri, 30–40; Cazzola, 1990, 11–24; Cazzola, 1991b; Roveda. For Venice, see Bevilacqua; Campos; Ciriacono.

was accomplished on single pieces of land; the massive campaigns of the late sixteenth century anticipated the modern hydrological transformation of huge areas.[43] In general, only ducal or city coffers were sufficiently large to defray the costs of anything other than small projects. The pressure of the Reno River flooding Sammartina south of Ferrara encouraged both Borso d'Este (1413–71) and his successor Ercole to shore up embankments, dig canals, and engineer strategic breaks to deflect flooding elsewhere. In the fifteenth century, Borso reclaimed about 1,000 hectares near Casaglia, primarily for a hunting reserve; he also drained the wetlands on the southeast of Ferrara around the convent of Sant'Antonio in Polesine, and incorporated it within the city's walls. His younger brother Ercole I d'Este reclaimed some land to the northeast near Ariano in the Selva Ferrarese, as well as just over a thousand hectares in the southern marshes of Sammartina for stables and pasture for his horses.[44] In exchange he received one-half of Sammartina, about 3,642 hectares.

It was no accident, then, that one of the Este emblems was a unicorn reclaiming a swamp with his horn: such an emblem referred both to the actual constitution of the duchy over the centuries in incremental stages of reclamation, and to the early efforts of the dukes to take on larger projects (Fig. 2).[45] Nonetheless, all of these enterprises were small-scale; most importantly, they were not intended to produce arable agricultural land, but rather to facilitate ducal leisure activities, such as hunting. Reclamation projects designed to secure new lands for cultivation began to be undertaken by individual property holders such as the Bevilacqua, Lavezzoli, and Calcagnini families in the early sixteenth century: these families excavated ditches and canals, erected levees and planted trees to shore them up, and kept the waterways clear of debris and silt where they passed through their properties.[46] None had access to the wealth Lucrezia enjoyed, so their

[43]Bondanini, 41, who recognizes Lucrezia's participation at Diamantina as the one whose funds completed the job. Neither Bondanini nor subsequent scholars note her activities at Sammartina, Redena, Brancole, or her other properties.

[44]Cazzola, 2004. Since Borso also erected farm structures and worker housing at Casaglia, he may have planned to cultivate some of the reclaimed land, but if so, his death ended the project: Cazzola, 1991a, 128–35.

[45]For a thorough, recent study of the Este use of the unicorn emblem, see Domenicali.

[46]Caberletti, 41–55, explains how Prisciano Prisciani, Borso's general factor in the Polesine of Rovigo, sought and received permission to undertake work on a large canal to reclaim an area that came to be known as the Prisciane; the project began in 1450 and ended around 1480, but was modified and improved by the architect Biagio Rossetti beginning in 1481. Only the latter was funded by the duke. By comparison with Lucrezia, Borso and Ercole I were willing to finance projects for leisure activities, but reluctant to spend their own cash for projects designed to yield arable land for farming.



FIGURE 2. Unicorn reclaiming swamps. Detail of Portal, Palazzo Schifanoia, 1469. Author's photograph.

projects consisted of an accumulation of endeavors patched together in piecemeal fashion. At Diamantina and Sammartina, as well as her other projects, Lucrezia operated on a significantly larger scale than medieval models.

Instead of being transitional, Lucrezia's reclamation projects were similar to those completed in the duchy more than forty years later; only her death

cut short her program. That it was not completed was not for lack of trying: in 1518 parts of Diamantina were left to fishermen because the land had not been drained in time, even though her castaldo Matio Fondato was continuing to shore up embankments, and was still constructing hydraulic infrastructure.[47] Robust work at La Redena and in Ariano persisted through 1518, particularly on the embankments surrounding the *serraglio*, and work continued for up to a year after her death.[48] Finally, beyond the properties documented here, Lucrezia also held and rented out other lands, including some in the district of Salvatonica, but their size, how she obtained them, and whether she spent capital on developing these properties, remains unknown.[49]

3. Acquiring Property: Donations

Certainly by 1513 at the latest, Lucrezia grasped the untapped potential of thousands of acres of marginal, waterlogged land, but she was too shrewd to employ her own resources to purchase it unless absolutely necessary. Instead, she leveraged her capital by spending it to reclaim property received in the form of donations or, in some cases, in emphyteusis.[50] Apparently her husband Alfonso also gave her part or all of other properties, such as La Redena and Sammartina.[51] Don Ercole d'Este, Alfonso's cousin, ceded half of Diamantina to Lucrezia in exchange for her agreement to undertake major hydraulic works that would benefit the entire property: both parties, in other words, profited from the arrangement, a characteristic of most of her enterprises. Typical of subsequent donations is the case of the commune of Ariano. The 114 men of the commune found

[47]ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1136, c. 8, 15 November 1518: "not having drained them in time"; c. 22^{v}, 27 September 1519, paid to Matio Fondato for work done in 1518, having "fixed the embankments around that piece of land"; 21 May 1518, payment to Biagio da Viadana for "having made a sluice gate in Mizzana to drain the waters of Diamantina," which he and his crew worked on for the entire month of April 1518.

[48]Ibid., c. 85^{r}, 28 July 1518. ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1136, 23^{r}, 18^{v} shows that reclamation was underway at Ariano in 1518 and continued in August 1519, when Matio Fondato, castaldo at Diamantina, led a crew from 23 to 27 August to clear out a ditch to drain the waters of Ariano.

[49]Lucrezia's account book for 1517 to 1519 records rental income from Salvatonica: ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1132, c. 37, 7 April 1518.

[50]Emphyteusis, or *livello*, consisted of a twenty-nine-year renewable lease at a fixed rent, usually five percent of the value of the property at the time the first contract was negotiated.

[51]Alfonso sold seventy-five hectares (193 acres) at La Redena to Francesco da Castello in 1509 for 2,000 ducats and wrote off some other loans to him at the same time, probably to acquire cash for the war that had just broken out. Quite likely he owned much more of the *serraglio*: ASFe, ANA, m. 283, Bartolomeo Codegori, p. 26, 24 December 1509. The Pio family of Mirandola also sold da Castello their interests at La Redena in 1509; ANA, m. 283, Codegori, p. 26 (1510), 8 March 1510, recording a sale in 1509.

much of their lands devastated and under water after the war with Venice, leaving them without the resources to pay their taxes on the extensive, waterlogged marshes. Throughout 1513 they deliberated at length on the available options. They finally decided to seek help in the form of outside capital, both to control the flow of water into their arable lands and to pay their taxes, and it was to the duchess that they turned. The agreement they brokered granted the wetlands known as the Valli di Ariano to the duchess in exchange for her agreement to pay the commune's feudal dues to the Ducal Chamber and to excavate canals and drain the *valli* (low-lying terrain). She in turn guaranteed them the right to drain their lands into the existing major (and several minor) canals, as well as into the ones she planned to construct in the future; she also agreed that they could continue to fish, collect wood, and grow *canna* (reeds) without paying the customary dues.[52]

Other donations, such as those involving the properties near Conselice and Filo, envisioned similar agreements, granted either by individuals or by the relevant town councils.[53] The men of Conselice settled longstanding boundary disputes by conceding all of the contested properties known as "La Berleda" to Lucrezia, who also received a donation of two other properties in Conselice from Dainese delle Vacche on the same day.[54] Brancole

[52]The *valli* extended from the Po di Goro to the borders of a village, Loreo: ASMo, Archivio Segreto Estense (ASE), C & S, b. 400, f. 1, s.f. 10; Rettori dello Stato, Ferrarese, Ariano, b. 12, "Donazione del comune e degli uomini di Ariano a Lucrezia d'Este Duchessa di Ferrara," 18 December 1513: "a decision made after much deliberation among the men and members of the council and votes in previous meetings . . . neither a sudden nor improvised decision, nor one made in fear or because of deceit, but spontaneously." For a detailed account of this donation, see Tumiati, 38–42.

[53]Cassano Carrelli and the men of Filo donated land adjacent to a broken canal and ditch to Lucrezia: ASFe, ANA, m. 293, Geminiano Dal Ponte, p. 3, f. 1514, 5 November 1514.

[54]ASFe, ANA, m. 283, Bartolomeo Codegori, p. 15 (1514), cc. 41^{r-v}, "Dainese delle Vacche donazione a Lucrezia Borgia"; ASFe, ANA, m. 493, Battista Saracco, p. 31s, 19 February 1514 and 15 March 1514. On 19 February 1514, the men of Conselice donated La Berleda to Lucrezia as a means of settling one of their disputes: "to receive [so as to terminate] the legal case and questions this community has with the de Benedetti of Conselice and the Rondinelli of Lugo . . . and place in the hands of the aforementioned [illustrious duchess] all rights that the community of Conselice has in the marshy, wooded and salt lands located in the territory of Conselice in the site named La Berleda." On 11 February 1514, Dainese delle Vacche di Conselice also donated two pieces of land to Lucrezia: "first, a piece of land once marshy, now in whatever condition and quantity, in the territory of Conselice in the site called Formigosa near the marshland of magnificent Oppizone di Polenta, on one side bordered by the river Fondo, on the other by [that of] the deceased Antonio Filippi of Conselice, and on another side the same magnificent Oppizone, and on the other the woods called the Selva of Lugo, and second, a piece of land once the embankment on a site called La Noce": ASFe, ANA, m. 493, Saracco, p. 31s, ff. 1514–1516; for partial transcriptions, see Cazzola and Folchi.

and Donegate, near Argenta, belonged to the Archbishop of Ravenna but were leased to Alberto d'Este, one of two property acquisitions Lucrezia negotiated that involved members of the Este family.[55] Sometime after Alberto's death, his heirs forfeited title when they failed to pay the taxes, so in 1514 Lucrezia sought and acquired both properties from the archbishop. When Alberto's sons learned of the transaction, they rebelled and demanded part of the lease. As was typical of most of her transactions, Lucrezia preferred coming to an agreement rather than dominating by virtue of her position or by pursuing a legal case. In this instance, she consented to the sons keeping a quarter of the leasehold, while she agreed to undertake the necessary improvements and retain half of the property in her own name, and would be granted another quarter from the Archbishop of Ravenna. She then promptly found herself in the middle of another dispute, this time with the men of Argenta, who had been freely using Alberto's lands and against whom Alberto had filed a lawsuit over boundary disputes. They too owed back taxes on their properties.[56] Although some wished to press their claims, others were reluctant to fight with the duchess. She negotiated an agreement with them in which all parties agreed to respect the boundaries designated by a ducal counselor in 1509. The documents specify that the men agreed to end their claims "neither by force nor fear nor other sinister motive, nor by force or fear of the authority of the excellent signora duchess," and also affirmed that the duchess had insisted to the magistrate hearing the case that "in the present suit he was to proceed as he would in a lawsuit of any private person."[57]

In short, Lucrezia appears to have operated with circumspection and attention to the rights of others, according to a general principle of fairness not always pursued by her husband. After her death, Don Ercole d'Este

[55]ASFe, ANA, m. 493, Battista Saracco, p. 31s, 16 January 1514, "Mandato di Lucrezia Borgia per Raffaele Rasponi and Giovan Battista Facchini al Arcivescovo di Ravenna Filiasio Roverella"; 15 February 1515, "Investitura a Lucrezia Borgia dal Arcivescovo di Ravenna." 11 June 1515, "Transazione tra l'illustrissima signora duchessa di Ferrara e l'illustrissimo Borso e fratelli, figli del quondam signor Alberto d'Este." Evidently some struggles continued, for in June 1517 Lucrezia sent her majordomo Francesco Lombardini to obtain the investiture and renewal of Brancole and Donegate from Cardinal Filiaso Roverella: ASFe, ANA, m. 283, Bartolomeo Codegori, p. 1, f. 1517, 15 June 1517, "Mandato per Francesco Lombardino."

[56]ASFe, ANA, m. 493, Battista Saracco, p. 31s, 18 August 1515, "Trasazione e composizione fra l'illustrissima signora duchessa di Ferrara e gli uomini di Argenta."

[57]Ibid., Trasazione Argenta: "indotti non per forza non per timore ne per altro sinistro pensiero, come dissero, ne per forza ne per timore dell'autoritia dell'eccellente signora duchessa . . . che nella presente causa si doveva procedere come se fosse causa di qualunque persona private."

wrote to Alfonso to complain about changes instituted at Diamantina by Alfonso's agents. Both Don Ercole and Lucrezia paid the annual, and much disliked, head tax (*boccatico*) for the families working the holdings, but even though Alfonso had originally agreed to maintain the agreements negotiated by the duchess, the duke's agents were now coming around to collect the *boccatico* from the tenants.[58] Directions to her agents regarding this agreement have not survived, but a letter from Lucrezia to the *podestà* of Massafiscaglia about a similar matter illustrates her concern that all parties be treated fairly, directing him to conduct the business "in such a way that neither of the parties has just cause to complain."[59]

Overall, she was quite clever in her property transactions; particularly shrewd was her arrangement with the Abbey of San Bartolo for the territory of Marrara. In 1509 she purchased the incomplete monastery of San Bernardo from the abbey with the intention of transforming it into a convent for women, San Bernardino.[60] The payment of 4,000 lire marchesane was deferred, but as time passed the abbey must have pressed for its money. In 1516 she persuaded the monks to absolve her of the debt by granting her the investiture of the *valli* of Marrara southeast of Ferrara; in exchange she promised to undertake capital investments to drain and improve the land, cultivating it by planting crops or by turning it into pasture.[61] The annual yield of one-half of the land would be paid to the abbey, with Lucrezia keeping the other half. In this way, she acquired

[58]ASMo, AE, C & S, Lettere per mittenti, Ercole d'Este to Alfonso d'Este, date unknown. The document is burned to the extent that it cannot be entirely reconstructed, but the relevant passages are: "Urged on by an express injustice enacted against the men of Settepolesini . . . on my account I cannot help but of that thing . . . complain to me about your officials who . . . are leveling the boccatico tax on those men which . . . I paid for them until I did the donation of half of the Diamantina . . . to the blessed memory . . . duchess and then her ladyship obligated herself to make that payment and until now there has been no problem . . . the men and more, that after the death of the said. . . . Your Excellency had (your agents) tell me that you wanted to keep . . . the manner (of doing things) and pacts that that signora duchess had."

[59]ASFe, ANA, m. 278, Antonio Maria Godi, p. 3, f. 1511, letter of Lucrezia Borgia to the *Podestà* of Massafiscaglia (Nicolo' Lombardini), 28 August 1511: "You saw what we wrote in another of our [letters] about the affair of Lucrezia de Notte and the recovery of her house, which is occupied and about which you are informed. And because said Lucrezia is going there for reasons other than this case, we want you to proceed with executing as we wrote earlier, and that you do what justice requires with all due speed in such a way that neither of the parties has just cause to complain."

[60]Ghirardo, 2003 and 2005.

[61]ASFe, ANA, m. 493, Battista Saracco, p. 31s, 6 July 1516, "Mandatum Illustrissime Dom. Ducisse Ferrariae."

longterm title to a huge piece of land, liquidated a debt, and used her capital only for improvements.

Bringing in other parties as partners by virtue of owning adjacent land or by sharing ownership with her was quite typical of her hydraulic works. Property owners in the Po Delta had long realized that alone they could not maintain the canals that drained their fields, canals whose integrity might depend upon events on adjacent or nearby properties. *Consorzi* (consortiums) of property owners eventually took shape as they began to recognize the need for cooperation to maintain hydraulic works — including the occasional construction of new ones — in the early sixteenth century. Likewise, cities viewed water control as a communal responsibility shared by all, and therefore required that residents work to maintain embankments and supervise them when threatened by floods.[62] For example, Lucrezia leased and owned parts of La Redena, but by 1518 she participated in a *consorzio* with neighboring property owners such as Cardinal Ippolito I d'Este and Alfonso da Castello, heir of Francesco, to maintain hydraulic works. Nonetheless, she had to expend her capital to pay for the reclamation. An inventory of 400 pieces of her jewelry, ranked according to their value, documents that in September 1516 she sold number seventy-one, a gold chain, to pay for building the levees at the *serraglio* of La Redena near Bondeno, followed by several other sales for other projects.[63]

She also used her newly acquired lands as guarantees for debts. In March 1515, she acknowledged being indebted to spice merchant Nicolò Coadis (or Coatti) for a total of 300 lire marchesane, which she agreed to repay to his agent Giunone Baldassare within three years. Baldassare had also paid 750 lire marchesane to the convent of Santa Caterina da Siena for the dowries of three of her *donzelle* (female attendants), and another 200 gold ducats that she owed to the heirs of a man from Reggio. In exchange, Lucrezia promised him the first piece of land in the village at Diamantina, and in the event she failed to pay her debts within the allotted time, he had the right to sell or otherwise dispose of the property.[64]

[62]Cazzola, 1990, 11–24.

[63]ASMo, AP, LB, b. 1139, inventory of Jewelry and other things, 1516–1519, c. 8: "The [gold] chain recorded as n. 71 on 2 September 1516 her ladyship sold to pay for the embankments at the Redena."

[64]ASFe, ANA m. 283, Bartolomeo Codegori, p. 28s, 1514–1515 21 March 1515, "Creditum Messer Nicolai di Coadis e promissiio pro Ill.ma Dna. Ducissa." Nearly a year later, Coatti renounced his claims to the land in Diamantina: Gillini, p. 6 (1515–16), f. 1516, c. 5^{v}; and ASFe, ANA, m. 390, Nicola Gillini, p. 13s, f. 1, 1516, 15 January 1516.

All of the donations seem straightforward and uncomplicated, but often the members of the various communities were conceding their de facto rights to property that had long been considered communal assets. When the duchess or other aristocrats assumed control of these properties, fishermen and farmers suddenly became renters required to pay for what had formerly been free, such as the rights to fish, to collect wood, and to graze livestock. The change in their position, perhaps less obvious at the outset, had serious long-term consequences. Throughout Northern Italy over the course of the sixteenth century, absentee landlords, usually members of the nobility, took over rural lands and leased them back to the peasants, often on terms most disadvantageous to those who actually worked the land, leading to progressive rural impoverishment. Lucrezia allowed the communities to continue using the lands until such time as she had completed her reclamation projects: at that point, they would have to pay rent.[65]

Although flexible in dealing with local communities and individuals, Lucrezia did not disdain traditional aristocratic prerogatives. While she bore the cost of reclamation, custom dictated that nearby rural residents maintain canals and embankments and, where necessary, excavate or erect new ones. Because the security of one piece of property depended upon the appropriate maintenance of levees and channels at adjoining ones, the failure of neighbors to complete their share of the work presented potentially significant problems. Such obligations were the rule in the Po Valley in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, although far from welcome to those required to perform the jobs: in effect, they had to subtract their labor from their own farms, which measured out in lost income. In a letter of 24 October 1518 to the citizens of Finale [Emilia], the duchess reprimanded them for the frivolous reasons they advanced for failing to start work they had agreed to do on the excavations and embankments adjacent to her property at La Redena. While custom was on her side about the labor requirement, her letter also reminded them that they shared an interest in the proper functioning of the area's hydraulic works: "We tell you that your excuses are quite frivolous for many reasons. . . . We exhort [you] and insist that, without further delay, you get a good start on the agreed upon works . . . so that if your waters threaten to flood our [lands] we are not forced to direct them toward you and submerge your town, which, as we

[65]One Nicolò del Bon rented land in Conselice: ASFe, ANA, m. 312, Sigismondo Anguilla, p. 1, ff. 1517–1522, c. 4, 4 August 1517. Other marshes in Diamantina were rented by Stefano Botaccio, fisherman: ASFe, ANA, m. 312, Sigismondo Anguilla, p. 1, ff. 1517–1522, loose sheet, 22 April 1518.

noted above, would much displease us."[66] Two days later a new agreement was drafted that spelled out the obligations of the men of Finale for these hydraulic works.[67] Notable, too, in this document, is the designation of one of the canals from the territory of Finale to Bondeno as "della Duchessa," a clear reference to the direct association of the duchess with the reclamation work.[68]

4. Livelli

When donations were not possible, the next best means of acquiring property was by investiture, usually from ecclesiastical authorities: renting and buying were the least attractive options. Lucrezia rented some acreage for pasture from a convent in Pomposa, and other woods and pastures near Conselice.[69] Archival sources document only one instance when she purchased property.[70] The grant of an investiture was a form of ownership, known as emphyteusis, or *livello*.[71] Because it was renewable in perpetuity, a *livello* effectively removed the owner's control over the property and permanently fixed the rent, normally in in-kind payments. Because the lessee could now sell or rent the holding, for all practical purposes the lessee claimed ownership, including title to all improvements, which was certainly an incentive to add buildings, vineyards, and other betterments with a view toward turning it over for sale or toward renting at a much higher rate.[72] In effect, the less developed the land, the greater its potential

[66]Archivio Storico Comunale Finale Emilia, inserto Guicciardini, 31/12, cited in Fosso, 263–64: "ve dicemo che queste vostre excusationi sono assai frivole per molte ragioni. . . . V'exhortamo e potendo stringemo che, senza alcun altra dilation, facciate dar bono principio all'opera concertata . . . afinche non fossimo forzata venendoci le vostre aque per inundarci forzarle dal canto vostro e sumerger lo paese vostro. El che non poco ci spiaceria come havemo sopradetto."

[67]ASFe, Archivio Frabetti, Collezione Antolini, b. 5, f. 25, sottofascicolo (s.f.)1, "Capituli conclusi per li agenti della Comitado del finale cum li agenti per el bondeno," 26 October 1518.

[68]Ibid., c. 2^{v}.

[69]ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1136, Autenticho 1518, c. xxxviii, 27 August 1518, for rental from convent of Santa Maria da Pomposa of woodlands La Rella and La Piopella to winter her livestock at 80 lire marchesane for one year; b. 1132, cc. 23^{v}–24^{r}, 28 September 1518, rental of woodlands and pastures in Conselice.

[70]ASMo, AE, b. 1132, Memoriale 1517–1519, c. 28, 18 November 1517, payment to Bartolomeo da Conselice for properties she bought from him as per a contract drafted by notary Michele da Baura in October 1517; I have not been able to locate the actual contract.

[71]See above, n. 50.

[72]Castagnetti, 219–34; Franceschini, 2003, 48–49.

value to the holder of the *livello*, precisely the type of property Lucrezia sought.[73]

Lucrezia's handling of her properties differed remarkably from her husband's management of his. As a means of securing loyalty, Alfonso's practice was to let out his property in *livello* to his courtiers, a tradition deeply rooted in Este court practice at least from the fourteenth century.[74] These twenty-nine-year contracts fixed his income at minimal levels, and unless the lessee forfeited title or failed to pay taxes, the duke permanently lost control of the property and could not anticipate higher income in the future. Such longstanding customs surely constrained the duke's ability to act on his property; but precisely because he was the duke, he could have chosen to reclaim land on his own and rent it out on short-term leases, much as his wife did. Indeed, in the lucrative *valli* of Comacchio, the duchy's source of salt and expensive fish, Alfonso did just that (as his father had done before him) by renting properties for one- or two-year terms at high rents, but this was unique among his landholdings.[75] Significantly, the high rents could be charged without the duke having to undertake any capital improvements: the salt and the fish were simply there, ready to be exploited.

By contrast, Lucrezia invested her capital to improve the land and then used it to pasture her livestock, to grow grain and other produce, and to rent it out on short-term contracts of anywhere from two to five years, often retaining a partnership role even as she continued to make improvements. This allowed her to retain far greater flexibility to renegotiate or terminate contracts, as might prove most advantageous. The rental of parts of La Redena and Diamantina as early as 1517, even with ongoing hydraulic works, illustrates her strategies. One contract with Francesco Masi was for a period of only two years, beginning in 1518, and at the same time she sold him 428 sheep and a pair of oxen; in 1517 she rented property in Conselice to others, who also agreed to clear the woods by the following

[73]ASFe, ANA, m. 283, Bartolomeo Codegori, p. 26 (1510–1511), 28 December 1509, Description of property in the Redena held in *livello* from the Abbey of Nonantola and sold by Alfonso to Francesco da Castello, who in turn would pay the required annual rent to the abbey. Precise ownership of this land is not always clear, but at least some belonged to the abbey, one of the largest landowners in the area, and the Este held some of the land in emphyteusis; other parts seem to have been owned outright by the Este.

[74]Dean. Many of Alfonso I's grants of *livelli* are recorded in the various notary records of ASFe, ANA, m. 382, Giovanni Cagnaccino.

[75]See ASFe, ANA, m. 393, Saracco, p. 31s, f. 1506, 9 Feb 1506, "Factoribus nostris generalibus dilectissimis," for a list of tenants, rents, and locations in Comacchio: the annual rents ranged between 371 and 6,442 lire.

summer.[76] Fishermen who continued to fish in the marshes of Diamantina also paid regular rents for the privilege, and others paid to collect wood from some of her other holdings.[77]

5. Produce and Livestock

Once Lucrezia had reclaimed a property, workers cultivated grains (*frumento*), barley, beans, olive trees, and reeds, either for sale in local markets or as fodder for her livestock. Other products included candles, oil, salt, cheese, and bricks from her brickworks.[78] Flax was also grown, since wives and daughters of agricultural workers living in traditional thatch huts at La Redena also spun linen for Lucrezia, evidently for her own wardrobe; vineyards produced wine that was brought to Ferrara.[79] Her livestock generated the most significant income, however, with cheese from milk cows and water buffaloes, beef and hides to be sold in Ferrara's markets; wool from sheep came for sale and her own use.[80] After collecting the goods in a palace she erected adjacent to the convent she founded in 1509, they were taken to her favored merchant, Pandolfo Mazuchello, a shopkeeper in the San Romano district who purchased cheeses, barley, and other grains from her agents.[81] Her personal commitment to investing her cash and jewelry

[76]ASFe, ANA, m. 374, Benedetto Codegori, p. 3, f. 7, 1517, "Affitus D. Francesco de Maziis ab Illustrissima Domina Ducissa," 25 September 1517. ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1136, c. 7^{r}, 11 October 1518. Alexander VI made Giovanni Borgia Duke of Nepi in 1501, shortly after concluding negotiations for Lucrezia's marriage to Alfonso I d'Este. The documents regarding the Nepi property remained in Lucrezia's hands and are preserved in ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1140; whether she supervised the properties remains unclear, but the short-term, high-rent contracts of these Borgia properties broke with local traditions and possibly served as a model for Lucrezia's rentals in Ferrara: Pineiro.

[77]ASFe, ANA, m. 312, Nicolò Gillini, p. 13s, f. 1, 1516, 15 January 1516, rental contract with spice merchant Nicolò di Coatti; ASFe, ANA, m. 312, Sigismondo Anguilla, p. 1, ff. 1517–1522, 11 July 1517, rental of woods in Consandolo to Bartolo of Argenta, aka Bagari.

[78]ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1136, grain sales, c. 8^{r}, 15 September 1518; b. 1132, c. 26^{r}, 5 November 1517, for bricks, c. 35^{r}, 16 March 1518, for grain, barley, beans, and reeds, and c. 30, 5 September 1517, for candles, oil, and salt.

[79]ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1132, c. xxxiiii, 24 and 18 September 1517, xlvi, 21 October 1519, and also 45^{r}, 46^{r}, xlvii, and 47^{r}; for the wine, c. xxxviii, 8 April 1518.

[80]For cheese, ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1132, c. 28^{r}, 18 November 1517; for *sozeda* (partnership) contracts with the men of Adria for her milk cows, ASFe, ANA, m. 301, Giacomo Savana, p. 23, 11 August 1518 and 6 December 1518; for beef, b. 1136, c. 7^{r}, 3 September 1518; grains b. 1132, cc. 45^{r}–xlvii, 1519. For detailed discussion of agrarian contracts in Ferrara, see Zucchini.

[81]ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1136, c. xxviii, 26 March 1518.

in livestock and reclamation was significant, as shown in the expenditure of 950 gold ducats from her son's estate for the purchase of 231 milk cows, bulls, and cattle.[82] A few years later, her treasurer reported that she pawned what the inventory of her jewelry described as number twenty in the hierarchy of value, a most beautiful piece consisting of a ruby and a lovely round pearl, to buy water buffaloes.[83] She would not have undertaken such capital investments unless she anticipated significant gains. It appears that whenever she had available cash, she purchased livestock. Only one month before she died, heavy with a difficult pregnancy, she purchased twenty foals, two young goats, three lambs, and three pairs of chickens for one property.[84]

Six years of activity, even though quite vigorous, do not allow us to anticipate what she might have done in the future, but we may hypothesize a continuing program of land acquisition and reclamation for pasture, fodder, and agricultural production, that she would persist with short-term rentals, and that she would also increase her livestock holdings. One way of understanding her program is to assess her income and expenses for one year, 1518.[85]

I arrived at the following calculations by separating out the expenses and income in each of the categories for the entire year of 1518: although I include *soldi* and *denari* in the calculations, for the purposes of the table I rounded off the sums in each category.[86] Some aspects are anomalous: it seems improbable that income from La Redena so exceeded that from Diamantina, and later records show that her holdings in Ariano were being cultivated and also contained some of her livestock, yet this does not appear

[82]ASFe, ANA, m. 283, Codegori, p. 14 (1514).

[83]ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1139 (1516–19), c. 41^{v}, 24 September 1517, "the Signora has it, she says to pawn to pay for the buffaloes." For a discussion of water buffaloes in Renaissance Ferrara, see Ghirardo, 2004.

[84]ASMo, AP, LB, b. 1136, Conto Generale, c. 36^{v}.

[85]Each year, income and expenses were recorded in several different ledgers, and then combined in one register, the Conto Generale. A complete set of registers for any one year has not survived, so an exact accounting is not possible. Moreover, many of those who contracted their labor to the duchess submitted their bills one or more years after doing the work, and often included labor at a variety of sites. Finally, none of her registers of animals survived, so there cannot be an accurate count of her livestock. The figures estimating income and expenses are therefore incomplete, but the comparison with 1519 helps confirm that they are reasonably accurate. The 1518 ledger does not record the stipend from the Ducal Chamber, documented instead in that of 1519.

[86]ASMo, AE, AM, LB, b. 1136, Autenticho, 1518. I draw all of the figures from this register.

Table 1. Lucrezia Borgia's Income and Expenses, b. 1136, Autentico, 1518 (in lire marchesane)

Income (1518)	**Expenses (1518)**
Ducal Chamber: 500	
	Alms: 143
Ships: 373	Ships: 37
Spendaria: 830	Spendaria: 992
Extraordinary: 154	Extraordinary: 918
Horses: 15	Horses and Stables: 170
Water Buffaloes: 33	
Beef Cattle: 693	Beef Cattle: 66
Milk Cows: 736	Milk Cows: 1,035
Sheep: 25	Sheep: 402
Wool: 807	
Grain: 1,095	
	Household: 1,324
	Travel (staff): 75
	Repairs, Palace Quarters: 79
Conselice: 511	
Argenta and Filo: 43	
	Ariano: 145
	Marrara: 1
Diamantina: 162	Diamantina: 103
La Redena: 2,292	La Redena: 365
	S. Bernardino Palace: 180
	Private Expenses: 1,933
Income total: 10,141	Expenses total: 7,957
Allowance: 10,800	Salaries: 2,854
Total Income: 20,941	**Total Expenses: 10,811**

in the income column.[87] Even invoking caution because of the limitations of the remaining records, her annual income increased over that of 1506–09, the only earlier period with extant (though partial) accounts, but nonetheless at a time when she was neither receiving income from, nor spending money on, reclamation and other agricultural enterprises.

[87]ASMo, AE, Amministrazione della Casa, Bestie, b. 11 (1522), c. 126, where Domenico Gremoleto, a worker on the "deceased duchess's holdings in Ariano," shipped grain from Ariano via the Po River to the ducal granary in Ferrara; it also notes that Domenico had a zoatica contract — a contract for the lease of oxen or other draft animals; by contrast with the socida contract, no provision was made for breeding these animals, or using them for cheese or other byproducts — for livestock with the duchess.

Without the conspicuous sum of *spese segrete* (private expenses), the gap between her outlays and income would have been even greater, for a total profit of 12,063 lire marchesane, or nearly 4,000 gold ducats.

Her annual surplus allowed her to continue with further reclamation projects and livestock purchases, leaving her free to spend nearly one-fifth of her total income on *spese segrete*, the unexplained category of cash disbursals in sums ranging up to 1,000 lire marchesane in her last account books, for items unknown even to her accountants.[88] The only indication of a destination for such private expenses is the account record of the jewelry and cash still owed by the heirs of Ercole Strozzi in 1519, which states that the loans had been registered under the categories of extraordinary and private expenses.[89] Some probably went to maintain Giovanni Borgia, who otherwise had no income after 1518 and, indeed, does not appear as a courtier on her payroll or on that of the duke the way Girolamo, Cesare's son and a page in Alfonso's court, does.[90] But some probably also went to her confessors and other religious figures in the form of cash gifts, which might account for the accusations Alfonso d'Este lodged against her last confessor, Tommaso Caiani, of having unspecified items that belonged to the duchess in his hands after her death.[91]

[88]Which, one might add, was done to their irritation. The entry by her treasurer in her account book of 1519 for a cash withdrawal of 1,050 lire marchesane conveys something of the writer's frustration: ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1136bis, c. 11^{v}, 15 February 1519: "(for) Private expenses of 1,050 lire marchesane . . . to our most illustrious duchess herself in five sacks to spend in expenses known to her Excellency without keeping any sort of record."

[89]ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1136bis, c. 39^{v}, 12 September 1519: "for every quantity of dinari that he had and spent of her deceased ladyship until the said Mister Ercole's death in multiple entries (in the categories of) extraordinary and secret (expenses) of her ladyship."

[90]From Carlo Ariosti's letters, it would appear that Giovanni Borgia received an allowance disbursed by Agostino Chigi, which ended in December 1518 when he was twenty years old. No other information about the source or amount of this allowance has yet surfaced, but it had probably been established by Alexander VI. Girolamo, Camilla, and Rodrigo Borgia do not appear to have had similar allowances; Rodrigo Borgia remained in Rome under the supervision of Alexander VI's brother, Cardinal Francesco Borgia, Cardinal of Santa Cecilia, as Giovanni had been until 1505. One can only speculate that the financial arrangements involved some sort of agreement between Lucrezia and the pope in exchange for her agreement to marry Alfonso d'Este. Chigi was a Roman banker and a close personal friend from Lucrezia's youth: Gregorovius, 91; Zarri, 2006, 309.

[91]Zarri, 2006, 154–59, 286–89. ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1139, "Inventario di gioie e altre robe 1516–1519." No record of jewelry or other items handed to him appears in her inventory of jewelry; nonetheless, there are references to unexplained donations, such as an emerald and a ruby "the Signora Duchess had them on 15 February and she says she donated them," c. 42^{r}, and others to unnamed monks at Ferrara's Certosa monastery, c. 20^{r}.

Although only partial ledgers remain for the period before 1517, there is evidence that she had trimmed expenses during and after the war by reducing the size of her court, which in 1502 consisted of 120 *bocche* (mouths) — of which about sixty-five were paid — but which by 1519 had shrunk to between twenty-eight and thirty-five salaried individuals, plus her *donzelle*. In the prewar years, she employed as many as six musicians, while at her death only one remained.[92] Such a reduction appears to have started during the war and to have remained in force even as her income rose in the postwar years. A smaller court required less in-kind support from the Ducal Chamber, nor did she need as much cash; if the ledgers are accurate, her cash stipend from her husband totaled only about 3,000 ducats in each of the last two years of her life. Her agricultural income more than made up the difference, which suggests that supplementing a reduced cash flow from the Ducal Chamber was also a probable early motivating factor for her entrepreneurial activities.

1518 was not an anomaly: while the accounts for 1519 terminate with her death in June, for those six months her receipts of L. 7,477 exceeded her expenditures of L. 5,984 by L. 1,493, and this without calculating her annual stipend from the Ducal Chamber.[93] In effect, her reclamation and livestock activities, while necessitating conspicuous capital investments, more than paid for themselves, even within the short space of six years. Her signature in her ledgers at a monthly review of accounts, her presence when contracts were being drafted in her private residence, the use of her inheritance from her son, and the sale of her jewelry to pay for livestock and reclamation projects: all testify to a direct personal engagement in these enterprises.[94] Unfortunately, only a few letters survive that hint at the degree of her involvement in her business affairs. As the ruler of a duchy frequently under threat of flooding, she could not have remained oblivious to, or uninformed about, the hydraulic problems Ferrara faced. As early as 1504 she wrote to the commune of Modena regarding the selection of a hydraulic engineer; and later to lament the city's refusal to choose her

[92]ASMo, AE, P, LB, b. 1136bis, c. 16^{v}, 38^{v}–39^{r}; Prizer, 8–9, discusses the reduction in musicians in her court, noting only the presence of Papino Mantovano in the second decade of the sixteenth century.

[93]These figures are drawn from ASMo, AE, b. AP, LB, b. 1136bis, 1519. Sitta, 10–14, explains how the marchesini (soldi) in Ferrara underwent a long steady decline in value over the course especially of the sixteenth century. In the years Lucrezia lived in Ferrara, the value of marchesini to gold ducats declined from sixty-three to one to sixty-four to one; in lire marchesane, three lire or four soldi thus equaled one ducat.

[94]ASFe, ANA, Bartolomeo Codegori, m. 283, p. 27, schede, 1512–1513, 27 September 1513, regarding the acquisition of Diamantina; or, regarding properties in Argenta, ASFe, Saracco, schede, 16 January 1514, 11 February 1514, and 9 October 1516.

candidate.[95] In addition to letters directed to the Gonzagas and to other individuals about grazing rights, boundary disputes, and livestock, such missives reveal knowledgeable and determined action in issues relating to the duchy's waters, her livestock, and economic matters in general.[96]

In the absence of Lucrezia's own letters, however, testimony emerges from those of her correspondents, ambassadors, and partners in property matters that, while limited in number, amplifies the notarial and account register materials. Although she made efforts to collect her son's estate beginning in 1512, letters from her ambassador in Rome, Carlo Ariosti — a canon of St. Peter's and a member of Cardinal Giulio de Medici's court — survive only for the years 1518 to 1519. During this period she charged him with the tasks of collecting the inheritance; with clarifying the accounts of Giovanni Borgia, the Infante Romano, in the records of the papal banker Agostino Chigi; and with clearing up some matters concerning the convent of San Vito in Ferrara and another convent in Cento.[97] In his responses, Ariosti frequently mentions the receipt of a letter from her, but he also repeatedly notes having received anywhere from two to nine letters from her on the same day.[98] Such storms of letters were not simply done in her name and without her participation; clearly she was as directly engaged with collecting her inheritance as she was with investing it. That she was determined to claim what was owed her is clear from the seven years she pressed on regarding her son's estate, asserting in the end that she needed to collect the outstanding sum in Valencia for "her most urgent needs."[99] Finally, a group of four letters from Ercole d'Este, her partner in

[95]Archivio Storico Comunale, Modena, Manoscritti di Pregio, Lettere di personaggi illustri, Letter from Lucrezia Estense de Borgia to the commune of Modena, 28 November 1504. A second letter on 24 January 1505 reported her dismay about the failure to choose Galvano — "we are not without some admiration that you thought it appropriate to elect anew other people, with little respect for us" — and reminded officials that there was still time to make a change.

[96]ASMa, AG, Autografi, Lucrezia Borgia, b. 2, f. 71, 23 April 1508, (conflicts over land); f. 105, 5 October 1508 (grains); f. 166, 21 August 1510 (livestock).

[97]ASMo, AE, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Roma, b. 24, f. 167, letters from Carlo Ariosti to Lucrezia Borgia. Ariosti also mentions at various points that he sought advice on the inheritance from Cardinal Giulio de Medici, later Pope Clement VII.

[98] Ibid., 16 October 1518, "I received three letters from your most illustrious ladyship"; 20 November 1518, "I received three letters from your ladyship at once"; 25 December 1518, "I received two letters from your ladyship"; 19 January 1519, "having seen several letters from your ladyship"; and on the same day, even as he was writing, "while I was writing nine letters arrived from your excellency."

[99]ASMo, AE, Cancelleria, Ambasciatori, Rome, b. 10, f. 165, 17 March 1518, Girolamo Naselli: "per i suoi urgentissimi bisogni."

the Diamantina reclamation project, survives.[100] Most are so damaged by fire that it is almost impossible to reconstruct complete sentences or paragraphs, but all make reference to Diamantina, and one legible passage states: "I saw what your excellency wrote to me about the division of the Diamantina. I have never been one who seeks to shirk his obligations. I will write to my [agents] there that they are to look to the agreement and that all must be done as stated in the [notarized] document between you and me."[101]

6. A Different Paradigm for a Patrician Woman

Most importantly, Lucrezia held title to her lands in her own name, not in her husband's; her entrepreneurial activities benefited her personal patrimony, not that of Alfonso. Even if she sold the produce in Ferrara's markets, she did so through a shopkeeper and collected on the sales. Although Eleonora d'Aragona clearly saw herself as the steward of her husband's holdings and supervised them diligently, no evidence has emerged to indicate that she, like Lucrezia, held landed wealth in her own name. Unlike Alfonso, Lucrezia did not expend capital on magnificent buildings or leisure retreats, activities that enhanced his princely status but which depleted, rather than created, wealth.[102] The palace she erected on Corso Giovecca between 1515 and 1518 was intended as a site for personal spiritual retreats and as the headquarters of her entrepreneurial activities, combining therefore in one setting what she clearly saw, along with her maternal and wifely duties, as the most important aspects of her life: spirituality and entrepreneurship.[103]

[100]ASMo, AE, C & S, Lettere per mittenti, Ercole d'Este to Lucrezia Borgia.

[101]Ibid., Ercole d'Este to Lucrezia Borgia, 26 November 1518: "Ho visto quanto vostra Excellentia mi scrive circha la divisione dela diamantina: io mai sonno per rimovermi da quello che ricercha il dovere: io scrivero a quelli mei [sic] li che vedano li Pacti e il tutto di quello se havera a fare come si conviene in lo instrumento fra lei e me."

[102]During the same years in which Lucrezia was doggedly acquiring swampland, Alfonso was erecting a fabulous leisure palace on Belvedere, an island on the far southwest corner of Ferrara, and he was also updating and expanding existing *delizie* (leisure retreats) at Magnavacca, Belriguardo, and Belfiore: ASMo, AE, Camera Ducale Estense, Munizioni e Fabbriche, b. 58 (1516), c. 38, for Belvedere; c. 101 for Belfiore.

[103]Samaritani, 2004, discusses her spirituality at length, 131–40; see n. 16 above. The impeccable account of Zarri, 2006, includes previously unpublished letters to and from Lucrezia. In ASMa, AG, Autografi, b. 4, 29 June 1519, Giovanni Gonzaga comments to Isabella d'Este days after Lucrezia's death that "this entire duchy is deeply saddened by her death . . . they say great things about her life here, and that perhaps for ten years she wore a silicio (a spiked piece of leather that abraded the flesh), and for the last two years she went to confession daily, and received communion three or four times a month."

The evidence suggests that her spiritual life was as important to her as her parental role, and that her contemporaries recognized and admired her piety and her dedication to her children. Scholars have not; in the recent secular eras, her biographers have disposed of matters of spirituality and motherhood fairly rapidly. Unless women were engaged politically in forming marriage alliances for their children, or, as highly educated patrons of art or literature, commissioned significant work, led important convents, or gained power as "living saints," their religious and maternal activities attracted no scholarly interest.[104]

With respect to her maternal role, during the years Lucrezia was assembling her properties, she gave birth to four more children — Alessandro in 1514, Eleonora in 1515, Francesco in 1516, and Isabella in 1519 — and probably suffered miscarriages between 1516 and 1518.[105] At the same time, she was raising and caring for their two surviving sons born prior to the war — Ercole in 1508, Ippolito in 1509 — as well as her illegitimate son, Giovanni Borgia, born in 1498.[106] The clothing and finery she commissioned for them, as well as regular reports on their well-being as recounted in her letters, offer eloquent testimony to her deep involvement in their lives and activities. In a 1518 letter to Alfonso while he was in France, she notes that she had to resist the habit of bringing their youngest son, Francesco, to him at the appointed daily hour, and she speaks fondly of how pleased she was with their children.[107]

Despite her demanding obligations and the death of another son in 1516, she pressed on with her acquisition and reclamation projects from late 1513 to 1519, but her economic activities were arguably consistent with her spiritual and maternal responsibilities. Years earlier, in 1505, she had a medal cast with her profile on the obverse and, on the reverse, a cupid bound to an oak tree, the famous *amorino bendato* (bound cupid).[108] As

[104]For "living saints," see Zarri, 1990.

[105]After the death at one month of their first son, Ercole's birth was cause for great celebration, but Lucrezia's unconcealed joy was most evident in 1515 with the birth of her first healthy daughter after having given birth to six male children and one stillborn female, and having suffered at least five or six miscarriages: ASMa, AG, Letters, Borgia, b. 3, 4 July 1515.

[106]See Appendix, p. 88 below.

[107]ASMo, AE, C & S, b. 141, Lucrezia Borgia to Alfonso I d'Este, 23 December 1518. The letters of Alessandra Strozzi are exemplary and, unfortunately, not matched for Lucrezia: see Gregory.

[108]The medal also contained the initials *FPHFF*, *ff* being the initials with which Lucrezia signed some of her letters to Pietro Bembo. To date scholars have not deciphered this puzzle.

Gabriella Zarri notes, the image invokes the containment of physical passions and attachment to the things of the world, and as such represents one of the main themes of early sixteenth-century court life: the need to resolve the apparent conflict between sacred and profane love.[109] Zarri observes that, judging from Lucrezia's exchange of letters with Pietro Bembo and the content of his *Gli Asolani*, themes of divine love and spiritual and interior beauty contrasted with worldly goods and exterior beauty were frequently subjects of their discussions.[110] Samaritani and Zarri both document that, in her second decade at Ferrara, Lucrezia tended to shy away from luxury and worldly activities other than those required by her station.[111] Instead, she became progressively more engaged with her religion, her children, and, as we have seen, her economic activities. The prudent attention she dedicated to her reclamation projects conveys an image of a responsible manager committed to augmenting her personal resources in ways that also took account of fairness to other participants, rather than simply exploiting all available means to enhance her patrimony. An effort to attain equilibrium between worldly matters and spiritual ones is perfectly consistent with her focus on spirituality, maternity, and entrepreneurial investments.

Careful management of personal and spousal resources was certainly not unique to Lucrezia. Eleonora d'Aragona was a model of thrifty oversight, but, as previously stated, does not appear to have owned land in her own name.[112] Isabella d'Este owned a small estate, Solarolo, on which she focused her management skills in the last decade of her life.[113] In a letter to her father in 1502, she proudly explains how she increased her income by 1,000 ducats from a village, Palidano, and how with the extra cash she purchased two more farm complexes, Castiglione Mantovano and one in Bondeno.[114] She proved to be as shrewd a manager as she had been a politically astute regent for her husband Francesco Gonzaga during his imprisonment in Venice; nonetheless, her resources did not match Lucrezia's, and she apparently lacked her sister-in-law's entrepreneurial approach of leveraging her capital by investing in reclamation projects rather than buying existing arable land. I stress *apparently* because despite

[109]Zarri, 2006, 49–50.

[110]Bembo, 1954, 1–2; Zarri, 2006, 55–60.

[111]Samaritani, 2004, 1001–03; Zarri, 2006, 76–78.

[112]Mazzi, 26–27.

[113]Little has been published about the economic activities of either woman: references to Isabella's management of Solarolo appear in Iotti.

[114]Prizer, 14, 32.

the impressive bibliography on her collecting and correspondence with artists, scholars have not explored Isabella's economic activities; the absence of all financial records at minimum complicates such an effort, and scholars have yet to explore evidence of her economic activities from her letters. The same is true of research on Beatrice d'Este, Isabella's sister and Duchess of Milan (1475–97), whose income was substantial, but how she managed her patrimony remains obscure.[115]

Caroline Murphy has recently documented how Felice della Rovere, illegitimate daughter of Pope Julius II (1443–1513), supervised the Orsini patrimony after her husband's death, and personally purchased an Orsini castle, Palo, with her own funds, and from which she marketed grains to Rome, especially to the Vatican during her father's papacy.[116] While she managed to secure a measure of economic independence, Felice never engaged in investments of comparable type or scope to those of the Duchess of Ferrara, and her wealth was negligible by comparison with that of Lucrezia, a woman who was also the illegimate daughter of a pope.[117] Much the same can be said of Eleonora da Toledo, the Medici bride also known to have managed agricultural enterprises later in the sixteenth century. Like Isabella d'Este, she was attentive to the management of her agricultural holdings and apparently also did some reclamation work, but on a scale far inferior to that of Lucrezia Borgia.[118]

The reclamation enterprises that Lucrezia initiated stand alone in the panorama of early sixteenth-century hydraulic projects, not only those initiated by women. Not until 1564 did the ducal family undertake anything of comparably ambitious scale, when Lucrezia's grandson, Duke Alfonso II, joined with several other families to reclaim just over 9,000 *ettari* (about 21,000 acres) in Ferrara's Polesine.[119] By then the contours of many of the lands she reclaimed had been altered by a series of ultimately unwise decisions. Between 1522 and 1526, Alfonso I reluctantly yielded to the insistence of the city of Bologna and of Cardinal Giulio de Medici (the future Pope Clement VII) that the Reno River be allowed to flow into the

[115]Beltrami.

[116]Murphy, 106–13; her estate was also marketed to Pope Leo X (ibid., 158).

[117]Lucrezia was the third child of Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia) and the Roman matron Vannozza Cattanei.

[118]Bruce Edelstein noted her small reclamation activities in his presentation at the conference on Donne di Potere, "Eleonora da Toledo e la gestione dei beni familiari: una strategia economica?" Milan, 30 November 2006. Marco Folin presentated an explanation of Eleonora d'Aragona's court, "La corte della Duchessa: Eleonora d'Aragona a Ferrara," on 30 November 2006: the proceedings of this conference are to be published in 2008.

[119]Cazzola, 2004, 90.

Po. He may have agreed to this in the mistaken belief that the Reno and other Appenine streams would move the waters more rapidly and reduce the ongoing blockage of the Po through the removal of deposits of dirt and debris along its course. Unfortunately, this move hastened, rather than retarded, the silting up of the river, and resulted in frequent floods that submerged vast acreages and effectively undid many of the older, more cautious reclamation projects, including some of Lucrezia's. Indeed, the gradual silting of the lower branch of the Po over the course of the sixteenth century, and the consequent reduction in transit taxes collected by Ferrara, a staple of the Duke's annual income, led Alfonso II to participate in the Great Reclamation project beginning in 1564.[120] The final blow to the effective operation of the Po as a source of transit taxes to Ferrara came with Venice's decision to undertake its own deviation of the river, the Taglio di Porto Viro (1599), which permanently altered the Po Delta and further damaged earlier drainage projects. Because the duchy's wealth during the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth centuries had been based largely on transit taxes, the economic need to undertake large-scale investments in reclamation was lacking; once the river began to silt up dramatically by the mid-sixteenth century, however, with the consequent reductions in tax income, new interest in hydraulic projects arose and powered the Great Estense reclamations.

Although some of Lucrezia's reclamation projects were lost and others remained incomplete, the key point is that a large-scale vision of transforming huge tracts of wetlands from fallow to arable land, accompanied by a willingness to invest significant resources in such an enterprise, did not emerge in Northern Italy on a scale comparable to that envisioned by Lucrezia until 1545, when Venice established an office, the Provveditorato sui beni inculti, to oversee reclamation in the Venetian hinterland, more than a quarter of a century after Lucrezia's death.

Perhaps the very paradigm within which Lucrezia was configured as a wife and duchess led her contemporaries to comment only on her jewelry, relations with women in the court, her piety, and her maternal duties. The dismissal of anything other than culture and politics as unimportant when it concerned women, and the lack of familiarity with the contours of the

[120]The bibliography on Ferrara's waters is vast, and several recent texts are cited above. For the decision to allow the Reno to flow into the Po, see Ceccarelli, 15–36. Diamantina survived, but La Redena, Marrara, Sanmartina, and other projects evidently retreated back to low-lying valleys frequently under water. The resultant silting up of the Po, and the loss of previously reclaimed land, was certainly an unintended consequence of allowing the Reno to flow into the Po in 1522.

emerging figure of a capitalist entrepreneur, also led her contemporaries to ignore her economic activities. And yet by investing in the systematic reclamation and capital formation of landed resources for her personal patrimony rather than in luxury and magnificence, she defied the conventions of her class and gender in the early sixteenth century. The space of the margin she occupied as a dutiful (and often pregnant) patrician wife paradoxically allowed her the freedom to engage in her entrepreneurial activities virtually unobserved and uncensored by her contemporaries.

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Appendix

Although much debated by historians, that Giovanni Borgia (the Infante Romano) was her illegitimate son seems highly likely, a point on which Zarri and I agree (Zarri, 2006, 19–20, and personal communication, 5 February 2007). As the financial records make clear, Lucrezia cared for him just as she did her legitimate son, Rodrigo d'Aragona, Duke of Bisceglie, having breeches, hats, cloaks, and other items of clothing made for them, but not for the other two male Borgia orphans. She also lavished jewelry on Giovanni, Rodrigo d'Aragona, and her legitimate Este sons, gifts not made to the others. In Ghirardo, 2005, 496, n. 78, I discuss in detail her special attentions to Giovanni Borgia, but an additional word appears to be in order here. Ercole I d'Este would probably have refused to welcome an illegitimate son in Ferrara, and, indeed, during Ercole's lifetime he did not: Giovanni came to Ferrara shortly after Ercole's death on 25 January 1505. Bernardino de' Prosperi reported to Isabella d'Este that Giovanni Borgia had arrived in Ferrara in the spring of 1505, and was sent on to Carpi in the care of Alberto Pio da Carpi: ASMa, Archivio Gonzaga, Correspondenza da Ferrara, b. 1240, f. 297, 1 June 1505. By contrast, Girolamo and Camilla arrived in Ferrara at least eighteen months later than Giovanni, and perhaps even later; an entry in Lucrezia's 1508 account book includes expenses to Pietro della Torre for a round trip to Rome "for a certain girl," followed two weeks later by expenses for clothing "for a girl who came from Rome": ASMo, AE, AP, LB, b. 1135, Autentico (1508), c. 17^{r}, 15 November 1508, and 17^{v}, 29 November 1508. It may well have been that Alfonso was more willing to accept the boy's presence than his father had been; certainly by late 1518 Alfonso was making concerted efforts to obtain a post at the French court for Giovanni, and he wrote to Lucrezia on 26 December 1518 that he did so out of love for her: ASMo, AE, C & S, b. 75. Comparable efforts do not appear to have been made by Alfonso for Cesare's son Girolamo or for Alexander VI's other illegitimate son, Rodrigo, nor did these young men receive special gifts, the rental of a house, or travel to or stays in other cities from Lucrezia, as Giovanni regularly did. Lucrezia's correspondence with Ariosti in Rome about Giovanni's accounts with the Chigi bank was also not matched for Rodrigo Borgia, who was indeed her half-brother. The accumulation of evidence in her account registers, letters to Alfonso and others about him, and her retention of documents related to his short-lived Duchy of Camerino and Nepi, all give him a status quite unlike the other three Borgia orphans and far more similar to that of her legitimate children. For the circumstances of the boy's birth, see Gregorovius, 126–27; Bellonci, 147–54. Lucrezia established the convent of San Bernardino for Camilla: Ghirardo, 2005.

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