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La Bella Principessa. Arguments
against the Attribution to Leonardo



The sensational attribution of an anonymous profile drawing of a young girl, called *La Bella Principessa*, to Leonardo da Vinci, which was reported in the press worldwide, makes an interesting case of contemporary connoisseurship. The drawing was executed in the mixed media technique of pen and brown ink, black, red and white chalks (or *trois crayons*), and body-colour, on vellum laid on oak panel, 33 × 23.9 cm [Fig. 1].¹ Cutting-edge Lumiere Technology (multi-spectral digitalization), as well as forensic sciences (fingerprint analysis), X-rays and Carbon-14 dating were among scientific methods of authentication used, in addition to the more traditional art historical approach led by Martin Kemp, Emeritus Professor of Art History at Oxford, and recognised expert on Leonardo's scientific work. The attribution was also publicly articulated, which is admittedly rare, in the book by Martin Kemp and Pascal Cotte, founder of Lumiere Technology, *The Story of the New Masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci; La Bella Principessa* (London, 2010), as well as in some scholarly articles² and web material.³ Further information was also reported by the press in numerous interviews and commentaries worldwide. More recently the present owner of the drawing, Peter Silverman, a Canadian art collector based in Paris, published his own account of the rediscovery and long process of authentication in *Leonardo's Lost Princess: One Man's Quest to Authenticate an Unknown Portrait by Leonardo Da Vinci* (New Jersey, 2012).

Nevertheless, despite the extensive publicity surrounding it, the drawing is not unanimously accepted as by Leonardo.

The anonymous drawing first emerged in the Old Master Drawings sale at Christie's, New York, on 30 January 1998, as lot 402: *Young Girl in Profile in Renaissance Dress*, property of Jeanne Marchig of Geneva, and was attributed by the catalogue to 'German school, early 19th century', so at that time it was considered a pastiche. It came from the private collection of Giannino Marchig, artist and art restorer from Florence. On the reverse the wooden panel had two customs stamps: 'Douane Centrale Exportation (?) Paris'. This stamp seems to have been introduced in 1864, but it is unclear when it ceased to be used in this form. The drawing was sold for \$19,000 (hammer price) to the New York art dealer Kate Ganz, an expert in Italian Old Master and modern drawings. She is the author of *Heads and Portraits – Drawings from Piero di Cosimo to Jasper Johns* (London and New York, 1993), and the daughter of well-known collectors of twentieth-century art. At that time the drawing was still thought to be a pastiche, a compilation of details taken from different works by Leonardo da Vinci, and such was Ganz's view. She only resold it nine years later, in 2007 (presumably no buyer could be found until then), for the same price and with the same attribution; Ganz made no profit on the sale. No doubt she must have shown it to many experts and art collectors during her ownership. The final buyer was Peter Silverman, who with the help of scholars undertook to prove Leonardo's authorship. Silverman later revealed to *Antiques Trade Gazette* that he acquired the drawing on behalf of a collector of contemporary art, 'independently wealthy and interested in charitable causes and animal issues' (this is confusing: the description seems to fit Jeanne Marchig, who set up an animal charity), looking to set up a 'non-profit-making foundation for multi-disciplinary Classical and Renaissance studies near Florence, to be headed by Professor Martin Kemp'.⁴

As reported in various sources, a number of Leonardo scholars are said to consider *La Bella Principessa* an autograph work by the master including Dr Nicholas Turner⁵, former curator at the British Museum and the J. Paul Getty Museum; Prof. Alessandro Vezzosi⁶, Director of the Museo Ideale in Vinci, Leonardo's home town and the first man to publish the portrait as by Leonardo in his book *Leonardo Infinito*; Mina Gregori, Professor Emerita of Florence University and President of the Fondazione Longhi; Dr Cristina Geddo, expert on Leonardo's Milanese followers; Prof. Claudio Strinati, Head of the City of Rome Museums; Prof. Carlo Pedretti, Armand Hammer Chair in Leonardo Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Head of the Fondazione Pedretti for Leonardo studies.

As reported by the press, the 'doubters' include such experts as Pietro C. Marani, Italy's most distinguished Leonardo scholar and former vice-director of Milan's Brera Museum; Everett Fahy, the John Pope-Hennessy Chairman of the Department

of European Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Carmen C. Bambach, curator of drawings and prints at the Metropolitan Museum and organiser of the exhibition *Leonardo da Vinci, Master Draftsman*; Martin Clayton, Keeper of Drawings in the Royal Collection at Windsor Castle, and curator of the Leonardo exhibition at the Queen's Gallery in 2003; Klaus Schröder, director of Albertina in Vienna; Thomas Hoving, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Nicholas Penny, Director of the National Gallery in London; David Ekserdjian, Professor of Art History, University of Leicester and expert on Italian Renaissance paintings and drawings; and other Christie's experts who allegedly 'misattributed' the drawing in 1998 to '19th century German school'. This group is mostly American and British.

As with many such cases of new attributions and rediscoveries, we are faced with a number of opinions, albeit scholarly, and they tend to differ. Yet if we are to achieve twenty-first century connoisseurship, and provide more reliable conclusions as to authorship and authenticity than the famously flawed experts of the past, we ought to systematically examine *all* the evidence, not only *in favour* of the attribution, as was done in the case of *La Bella Principessa*, but also *against* it. Even the apparent objectivity of sciences can be influenced by personal convictions, depending on the individual interpretation of the data. It seems that those who so far rejected the attribution to Leonardo based their opinions on intuition and first impressions (Hoving: '*La Bella Principessa* is too "sweet" to be a Leonardo'; Bambach: 'It does not look like a Leonardo', etc.) and only made cursory remarks in the press, but on the whole, criticism of the new drawing remained unarticulated in a more systematic way.

Admittedly, one of the 'doubters', Pietro C. Marani, published in 2012 in France (*Dossier de l'art*)⁷ a short article on the drawing and another rediscovered painting attributed to Leonardo, *Salvator Mundi* (*Saviour of the World*), 1498–1506 (private American collection). Firstly, he pointed out that the drawing was much retouched and restored, and from the technical point of view, 'very unusual for Leonardo'. He adhered to the group of scholars who 'remained very cautious', because 'the retouching in tempera and the obvious repaints, with different types of inks, tend to place it at a later period'. But, according to him, under these later interventions there is 'an older state', with finer, left-handed hatching. 'Yet we must specify that it is possible to find this type of hatching in the drawings of Leonardo's pupils; perhaps they were imitations made to be sold as the originals by the master or the simple copies faithfully executed'. On the other hand, Marani dismissed the negative opinions of some critics (among others, David Ekserdjian's) that there were no records of a Leonardo portrait of a Milanese princess: 'in itself, however, such a silence means nothing'. Nevertheless, he was 'perplexed by the fixity of the profile – with very rare corrections of the contours – and the excessive care of the decorative aspects of the costume and



1. Anonymous drawing, «La Bella Principessa», c. 1595–1596, pen and brown ink, black, red and white chalks or *trois crayons*, and bodycolour, on vellum laid on oak panel, 33 × 23.9 cm, Switzerland, private collection. Photo: Wikipedia

hairstyle, whose very highly finished state contrasts with the liveliness and flexibility characteristic of the execution of Leonardo's drawings'. He pointed out that Leonardo's *Portrait of Isabella d'Este* shows a different technique, with many repaints, corrections and barely sketched areas, while 'the face drawn on the parchment is static and has no life'. Marani wondered if it could be an 'official' portrait, a type of miniature imitating a painting and inserted in a book, as was, we will later see, advanced by Prof. D. R. E. Wright in relation to the *Sforziad* in Warsaw. But according to Marani, this hypothesis 'does not solve the problem of attribution to Leonardo (problematic, in a codex illustrated by Biragol)', and he proposed someone in the entourage of the master, perhaps Giovanni Ambrogio de Predis, whose style is equally dry and static. The hatchings could have been made from left to right in order to imitate Leonardo's graphic manner.

Another negative opinion on the attribution can be found in a short critical review of Kemp and Cotte's book by D. Ekserdjian, 'Leonardo da Vinci: "La Bella Principessa" – The Profile Portrait of a Milanese Woman', *The Burlington Magazine* (June 2010).⁸ The author, sceptical of the attribution to Leonardo, rightly pointed out that 'we hear nothing of its doubters in these pages'. According to Ekserdjian,

there are only two plausible options: either *La Bella Principessa* is indeed by Leonardo, or it is a subsequent counterfeit. Were the latter to be the case, as I personally strongly suspect [...] then it is tempting to wonder if its creator did not seek inspiration from medallions (?) portraits and other sculptural modes, and in particular from the polychrome bust of a woman [...] by Francesco Laurana in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. [...] Notoriously, such cross-media sources were employed to cover their tracks.⁹

Ekserdjian also found other apparent weaknesses in the attribution: the lack of thoroughness and rigour, and above all the almost total absence of close comparisons with unimpeachable works by Leonardo. The present article aims to fill this gap and examine all the arguments *against* the attribution to Leonardo, as well as make critical comparisons with indisputable works by the master.

Prof. Kemp and his colleagues are no doubt genuinely convinced of the authenticity of the drawing, as well as highly enthusiastic about the rediscovery. The beauty and the quality of the portrait are evident, but in a way they form a smokescreen which prevents us from looking at the object dispassionately. Descriptions mentioning an 'aura of mystery', 'indescribable delicacy and tenderness' or 'purity' are often being quoted. Indeed, this rather too highly finished drawing for Leonardo, who famously could not complete anything let alone a sketch, would make a wonderful addition to the too scarce oeuvre of the Italian master. But, and there is a serious but, as art historians we

have a duty to adhere to the facts of art history. As we will see in this paper, a careful and detailed analysis of all the evidence discloses a number of significant problems and contradictions, which clearly undermine the attribution to Leonardo.

The first essential flaw is that even after a thorough research the drawing has no known provenance prior to the twentieth century, when it was first recorded in the collection of Giannino Marchig. Unfortunately, the latter never revealed how he had come to possess the painting – leaving the provenance uncertain. In general terms, such complete lack of provenance casts serious doubts on the authenticity of any work. Presumably numerous searches have been made and proven fruitless, at least from 2007 onwards, the date of the acquisition of the drawing by Mr. Silverman. Apparently Marchig left no records as to where he had acquired the drawing. The work was also unrecorded in Leonardo's writings, as well as in the art historical literature, including inventories and sale records. The only comparable drawings by Leonardo listed in the inventory of his effects, and datable to the early 1480s, such as 'Una testa in profile con bella cappellatura' ('A head in profile with beautiful hair') or 'Una testa di putta con trezie rannodate' ('A head of a girl with plaited locks')¹⁰, were heads, not busts, as is the case here.

The serious drawback of the lack of provenance had to be remedied and a solution was finally found, but only after the publication of Kemp and Cotte's book. Their new hypothesis was published on the Lumiere Technology website, in an article entitled 'La Bella Principessa and the Warsaw Sforziad'. In brief, the entirely unusual for Leonardo medium of vellum commonly found in manuscripts led Prof. Kemp and his colleagues, including David Wright, Emeritus Professor of Art History at the University of South Florida, to search fifteenth-century codices for an excised illumination. The vellum folio would have been cut out from a manuscript, as indicated by the knife marks on the left hand margin of the drawing. In the meantime, the depicted girl has been (tentatively) identified by Kemp as Bianca Giovanna Sforza (1482–1496), the illegitimate and little known daughter of Leonardo's patron, Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan, and his mistress Bernardina de Corradis. Because of this identification, provenance searches concentrated on manuscripts related to the Sforza family. It is now thought that the portrait comes from the codex which is said to have been specifically made in 1496 to celebrate Bianca Giovanna Sforza's marriage to Galeazzo Sanseverino (b. Naples, 12 June 1458 – d. Pavia, 25 February 1525), and is now in the National Library (Biblioteka Narodowa) in Warsaw. A detailed study confirming this hypothesis was written by Prof. David Wright, *Ludovico il Moro, Duke of Milan, and the Sforziada by Giovanni Simonetta in Warsaw*, published on the above mentioned website.

In this paper we will attempt to demonstrate that neither the identification of the sitter as Bianca Giovanna Sforza, nor the theory of the *Sforziad* manuscript in Warsaw have any truly solid

foundations. We will also discuss the Marchig provenance, the style and technique of the drawing in comparison with Leonardo's secure works, the problem with the dating, and demonstrate why all these factors cast doubts on the attribution to Leonardo.

Let us put *La Bella Principessa* on trial, and see if this newcomer to the rarefied world of Leonardo da Vinci can defend herself.

The Marchig Collection

Kemp wrote the following about Giannino Marchig and the drawing in his possession:

Giannino Marchig worked in Florence and then in Geneva, to which he moved in 1953/4. Although the portrait was in a nice Italian frame (subsequently removed by Christie's), he kept it in a portfolio. Some years after her husband's death, Mme Marchig hung it on a wall in her study. Giannino Marchig worked internationally as a respected restorer, and in 1976 undertook major conservation on one of the two prime versions of Leonardo's *Madonna of the Yarnwinder*, then owned by Wildenstein's in New York. He was of the opinion that the portrait was by Domenico Ghirlandaio, which is understandable, given its affinities with Ghirlandaio's refined profile portraits of aristocratic Florentine women.¹¹

From this quote, we can first of all gather that Marchig was familiar with Leonardo's technique. In fact, Giannino Marchig (Trieste, 1897 – Geneva, 1983)¹² had a passion for and great affinity with Italian Old Masters and their concept of beauty, and as reported, experienced an intimate communion with objects when restoring and studying them.¹³ He became renowned as a restorer, but was somewhat forgotten as a painter. It is to be noted that Marchig exhibited in Warsaw in the 1920s, a fact perhaps of some significance to the hypothesis of the *Sforziad* from Warsaw.

In the mid-1930s Marchig started visiting Bernard Berenson's Villa I Tatti, a famous mansion in Settignano, near Florence, now The Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies. There, he frequented a circle of artists, art historians, and critics, who gathered around the eminent American art expert Bernard Berenson (b. Butrimony, Vilnius, Lithuania, 1865 – d. Settignano, 1959). We are also told that Marchig's beliefs about art were close to those of Berenson, who was one of the most celebrated connoisseurs of Italian Renaissance paintings and drawings. Berenson's reputation was established by his scholarly publications. In 1903, he published his most important work, *The Drawings of the Florentine Painters*. Berenson rediscovered many new works of Renaissance art and devised the method of the *catalogue raisonné*. He also bought many paintings for his

collection, and several hung on the walls of the villa. Marchig spoke good German, and this favoured the exchange of ideas with Berenson, who often used this language; their contact turned into friendship. At the Villa I Tatti, Marchig was able to deepen his art historical knowledge as well as that of the Old Masters' technique. It was an ideal place to meet important art collectors and museum curators, many of them American. Marchig learnt the secrets of *imprimaturas*, pigments, glazes and the *chiaroscuro*. He worked for a number of public institutions, as indicated by the photographic documentation of paintings during and after restoration, recently discovered at the villa (in the photo library of the Harvard Center for Renaissance Studies, Florence). Marchig also collaborated with another famous Italian art historian and connoisseur, Roberto Longhi (1890–1970), who often visited him in his studio in Florence.

All this is potentially significant for *La Bella Principessa*. If Marchig had owned an authentic drawing by Leonardo, his friends and connoisseurs such as Berenson or Longhi would have surely noticed it and attributed it to the master. Silverman said in his book that 'in 1955, when Jeanne married Giannino Marchig, he owned the pen-and-ink drawing with pastel highlights on vellum, and she was quite drawn to it'.¹⁴ Berenson died in 1959 and Longhi in 1970, so they were both alive when Marchig owned the drawing. Surely, he must have asked their opinion as to the attribution, especially if it looked so much like a Leonardo. Intriguingly, we learn that Marchig himself was considered 'a Leonardesque painter': 'The study of antique art led him to make numerous trips to Spain and London and then return to his studio overlooking the Arno in Florence, where he is remembered for being a Leonardesque painter, in reference to the style of Leonardo da Vinci'.¹⁵

The Sitter: Bianca Giovanna Sforza?

The sitter proposed by Martin Kemp was Bianca Giovanna Sforza, and she is also directly linked to the *Sforziad* hypothesis. Kemp acknowledged that there were only a few possible candidates for Leonardo's highly finished portrait of a young girl: Beatrice d'Este, Isabella of Aragon, Bianca Maria and Anna Sforza, or Bianca Giovanna Sforza; for him the latter candidate stood out. Bianca Giovanna Sforza was born in 1482, and died on 22 November 1496, aged only fourteen. On 31 December 1489 she was married to a distant relative of her father's, the Milanese military commander, Galeazzo di Sanseverino.

It has to be said from the start, however, that there are no secure likenesses of Bianca Giovanna Sforza, so no verifiable points of reference for this identification. In fact, *Portrait of a Young Woman* by Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio (second half of the 15th c., oil on canvas, Castello Sforzesco, Milan) has been proposed as the probable likeness of Bianca Giovanna Sforza,

and she looks very different from *La Bella Principessa*. Another likeness of Bianca has also been suggested by, among others, Julia Mary Cartwright (Ady), art historian of the Italian Renaissance: a young girl in the painting by Ambrogio de Predis, *Portrait of a Lady (Bianca Giovanna Sforza?)*, c. 1490 [Fig. 2]. It seems to me that both sitters indeed look similar (dark eyes, long and slightly upturned noses, comparable hair colour and style) and show the same person dressed in similar colours, possibly Bianca Sforza. Could she be in mourning in both portraits? In October 1493 Beatrice's mother, Duchess Leonora of Naples died, and the whole court was in mourning. In October 1494, Gian Galeazzo Sforza, Ludovico's nephew died, and thus the court was again in mourning. The young man in the companion Ambrosiana portrait, which might show Bianca's husband Galeazzo Sanseverino, as we will show later, is also partly dressed in black.

But the profile of *La Bella Principessa* clearly differs from both of these portraits (a different nose and light eye colour) and cannot depict the same individual. Kemp suggested, however, that the sitter in the portrait in the Ambrosiana could be Anna Sforza, another of Ludovico's nieces, although he has no proof of this hypothesis, as there are no secure identified portraits of Anna Sforza known.

Let us extensively quote Cartwright, who wrote about Bianca Sforza and Galeazzo Sanseverino, and the portrait in the Ambrosiana, in her thoroughly researched biography *Beatrice d'Este, Duchess of Milan, 1475–1497. A Study of the Renaissance*:

Meanwhile the Moro loaded his favourite Galeazzo with honours and rewards. [...] As a last and crowning honour, he bestowed upon this fortunate youth the hand of his illegitimate daughter Bianca, a beautiful and attractive child to whom he was fondly attached. Of her mother we have no certain knowledge, but she is generally supposed to have been some mistress of low origin, and Bianca herself is described by a contemporary writer as 'figlia ex pellice nata'. The wedding was solemnized with great splendour in the chapel of the Castello di Pavia, on the last day of the year 1489, but the young princess was still a child, and Galeazzo had to wait five years before he took home his bride. After his marriage he adopted the name of Sforza Visconti, and was treated by Lodovico as a member of his family.¹⁶

The marriage did not last as the young girl quickly fell ill and died.

That autumn a fresh and unexpected blow fell upon the ducal family, in the death of Lodovico's beloved daughter Bianca, the young wife of Galeazzo di Sanseverino, who died very suddenly at Vigevano, on 22 November. Both the duke and duchess had been fondly attached to this fair young girl who had become the wife of Galeazzo only four or five months before, and was one of Beatrice's favourite companions. Her sudden and premature

death threw a gloom over the whole court, and in elegant verse Niccolò da Correggio deplored the loss of the gentle maiden who had gone in the flower of her youth to join the blessed spirits, and grieved for the gallant husband whom a cruel fate had so early robbed of his bride. There can be little doubt that we have a portrait of this lamented princess in the beautiful picture of the Ambrosiana, which, long supposed to be the work of Leonardo, is now recognized by the best critics as that of Ambrogio de Predis. At one time this portrait was said to represent Beatrice herself, but neither the long slender throat nor the delicate features bear the least resemblance to those of the duchess, while the style of head-dress is equally unlike that which Beatrice wears in authentic representations.¹⁷

A painting by Ambrogio de Predis, *Portrait of Beatrice d'Este* (oil on panel, 51 × 34.5 cm, Oxford, Christ Church Picture Gallery), looks very similar to her likeness in the Cenotaph of Ludovico il Moro and Beatrice d'Este in Certosa di Pavia, and can thus be considered a secure identification of Beatrice. In both representations Beatrice d'Este had a small, short, rounded nose, unlike the young girl in the Ambrosiana picture, whose nose is prominent and slightly upturned at the tip. Cartwright:

Again, some critics have supposed the Ambrosiana picture to represent Kaiser Maximilian's wife, Bianca Maria Sforza; but the discovery of Ambrogio de Predis's actual portrait of the empress, and of his sketch of her head in the Venetian Academy, have shown this theory to be impossible.¹⁸

The discovered portrait mentioned by Cartwright was Ambrogio de Predis' *Bianca Maria Sforza*, c. 1493 [Fig. 3]. The charcoal drawing of Bianca Maria Sforza (1492; Venice, Accademia) dates from the period before her marriage to Emperor Maximilian I. The portrait was ordered by her future husband, through Frederick III, Duke of Saxony, to give him an idea of her appearance. It was favourably received, and later the painting of the same subject (Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art) was commissioned from Giovanni Ambrogio. The features of the sitter are indeed quite different from the one shown in the Ambrosiana portrait.

[...] the commentator, Marcantonio Michiel, describes, in the house of Taddeo Contarini in Venice in 1525, a 'retrato in profilo insino alle spalle de Madonna...fiola del signor Lodovico da Milano maritata nello Imperatore Massimiliano fu de mano de...Milanese' (*Notizia d'opere di disegno*, 2nd rev. ed., ed Gustavo Frizzoni, Bologna, 1884: 166). But this portrait of Bianca Maria, whom Michiel wrongly identifies as Ludovico's daughter rather than his niece, is specifically said to be only bust-length ('alle spalle').

we read on the National Gallery of Art, Washington, website.¹⁹



2. Ambrogio de Predis, «Portrait of a Lady (Bianca Giovanna Sforza?)», tempera and oil on panel, 51 × 34 cm, Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Wikimedia



3. Ambrogio de Predis, «Bianca Maria Sforza», c. 1493, oil on panel, 51 × 32.5 cm (overall), Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art, Widener Collection, 1942.9.53. Photo: Courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC



4. Leonardo da Vinci (?), «Portrait of a Musician», c. 1486–1487 or 1490, oil on panel, 44.7 × 32 cm, Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. Photo: Wikipedia

The picture in question could be another bust-length portrait now attributed to the workshop of Ambrogio de Predis, *Profile Portrait of the Empress Bianca Maria Sforza (1472–1510)*, c. 1493/1495 (oil on panel, 47 × 38 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie), or the portrait in Paris (Louvre) by Bernardino dei Conti, *Bianca Maria Sforza, Second wife of Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519)*.

It is also quite clear that *La Bella Principessa* has a very different profile from Bianca Maria Sforza, as depicted by Ambrogio de Predis or Bernardino dei Conti (with large protruding noses, small receding chins).

Intriguingly, there is confusion among scholars as to the two Biancas. Bianca Giovanna Sforza was advanced by Kemp as the sitter of our drawing, but oddly, Bianca Maria Sforza was advanced by Prof. Vezzosi, and endorsed by Nicholas Turner.²⁰ It seems that the two distinct identifications of the sitter in *La Bella Principessa* went so far unnoticed, yet they indicate an important contradiction within the attribution. Bianca Maria Sforza (1472–1510) was Holy Roman Empress, the second wife of Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor. She was the eldest legitimate daughter of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan, by his wife, Bona of Savoy.

Dismissing the rather obvious differences in facial features, Vezzosi suggested her as the portrayed sitter in *La Bella Principessa*:

A hypothesis for the identification of the sitter might also be suggested in passing: she could be a member of the Sforza or a similar noble family, for example Bianca Maria Sforza as a young woman. In 1494 Bianca Maria, the second-born daughter of Galeazzo Maria, Duke of Milan, and Bona di Savoy, kinswoman of the king of France, married the Emperor Maximilian I, who would praise her beauty rather than her character. The wedding ceremony and the marriage procession, at which it is sometimes said that Leonardo himself may have participated, were memorable. The comparison with the presumed portraits of Bianca Maria attributed to Ambrogio (National Gallery of Art, Washington) or to Bernardino (Louvre) is eloquent: they reveal not insurmountable distances.²¹

And Nicolas Turner endorsed it:

In his recent book, Alessandro Vezzosi identified this type of portrait as a *ritratto nuziale* ('marriage portrait'). He postulated that it may represent the young Bianca Maria Sforza (1472–1510), the daughter of the Duke of Milan, before her marriage in 1494 to the Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519). Her husband later praised her beauty rather than her character. The sitter's facial features conform to what Leonardo describes in his Treatise as the 'perfectly illumined visage', showing grace, since the shadows do not appear 'cutting, hard or dry' (Dover reprint, Precept no. 196). Such

a function – a portrait sent for approval to a prospective groom – would explain the drawing's unusual media, support and high degree of finish.²²

I would like to disagree with this identification of the sitter; the differences between *La Bella Principessa* and the known portraits of Bianca Maria Sforza are considerable, as their profiles are evidently quite dissimilar. We have yet another likeness of Bianca Maria Sforza by Bernhard Strigel, *Bianca Maria Sforza (1472–1510), Second Wife of Emperor Maximilian I* (oil on panel, 76 × 43.5 cm, Innsbruck, Schloss Ambras, Porträtgalerie). This portrait confirms the same features (large protruding nose, small chin) as in the other two pictures by Predis and Conti, as well as ruling out the similarity with *La Bella Principessa* and the portrait in the Ambrosiana.

Cartwright concluded that the portrait in the Pinacoteca Ambrosiana showed Bianca (Giovanna) Sforza, and the companion picture, her husband:

For we have here, there can be little doubt, the portrait of Lodovico's daughter, by the hand of a Milanese painter, in all probability, as Morelli divined, the court-painter of the ducal house, Ambrogio de Predis. And the German critic, Dr. Müller-Walde, is probably right in his conjecture that the companion picture in the Ambrosiana is the portrait of Bianca's husband, Galeazzo di Sanseverino. This picture has been called by many names, and ascribed to many different hands. It has been described in turn as a portrait of Maximilian, of the short-lived Duke Giangaleazzo, and of Lodovico Moro himself. But Ambrogio's portrait certainly represents none of the three, and it is far more likely that we have here a likeness of the duke's son-in-law, painted about the time of his marriage to Bianca Sforza. This handsome man of thirty, in the fur-trimmed vest and red cap, with the dark eyes, long locks, and refined thoughtful face, touched with an air of melancholy, may well be the brilliant cavalier who played so great a part at the Moro's court, the patron of Leonardo and Luca Pacioli, and the loyal servant of Duchess Beatrice.²³

Interestingly, Cartwright refers here to the painting now called *Portrait of a Musician* [Fig. 4], which is presently ascribed to Leonardo, although the attribution is the subject of controversy. The identity of the 'musician' remains unresolved. It is unlikely that a musician (therefore a person of lower social status) would be portrayed in this way, particularly as a possible pendant to a portrait of a patrician lady. It has been suggested that this could be Leonardo's portrait of his friend and pupil, Atalante Migliorotti (1466–1532), a musician who worked in his studio. Leonardo is known to have made his portrait (now presumably lost) in 1483 in Milan. But it was mentioned in his papers as a drawing 'a head portraying Atalante, raising his face', which is evidently not the case here, as it is not a drawing but a painting,



5. Leonardo da Vinci, «Head of a Youth», c. 1491–1493, black chalk on paper, 19 × 15 cm. Photo: © Royal Collection Trust, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2013

it is not a head but a bust, and the face is not raised. Also Atalante would only be 17–19 years old at that time, and the sitter in the Ambrosiana portrait looks considerably older. In my opinion, this could be another drawing by Leonardo, *Head of a Youth* [Fig. 5]. The sketch shows a head of a young man, and the face is indeed raised. In my opinion, it most probably shows Atalante.

There are other reasons why the portrait of the presumed 'musician' could be the pendant to Ambrogio de Predis' *Portrait of a Lady* in the Ambrosiana: the size and the colouring are comparable; both works are painted in tempera and oil on wood (walnut), and they are traditionally paired. On the other hand, if the female portrait in the Ambrosiana were to show Anna Sforza, as suggested by Kemp, the male portrait ought perhaps to show her husband, Alfonso I d'Este, whose likeness we know, but the two men look quite different. Also Alfonso was born in 1476, so he would only be 10–14 years old in this portrait, which is dated c. 1486–1490. It should also be noted

that *Portrait of a Musician* is dated around 1486–1490, whilst the marriage of Galeazzo di Sanseverino to Bianca Sforza took place on 31 December 1489. The timing is right: Galeazzo would have been about 28–32 years old, which is likely, looking at the sitter. But the question remains why the Milanese military commander Galeazzo di Sanseverino would be portrayed holding a sheet of musical notation?

Maike Vogt-Lüerssen, author of a number of books on the Sforza family²⁴ suggested to me that Galeazzo di Sanseverino, who went down in history as the greatest tournament fighter of his time, was also a generous patron of scholars and artists. Because of his great charm and his courteous manners, Galeazzo was considered an ideal knight following the principles of Baldassare Castiglione. He was also a graceful dancer and singer – the way he is depicted here might refer to his love of music and singing. The suggestion by the German critic Dr. Müller-Walde that the painting in the Ambrosiana shows the likeness of Galeazzo Sanseverino, endorsed by Cartwright, was confirmed by Pierangelo Laurora and Maike Vogt-Lüerssen.

I would also agree with this opinion, because another argument stands out in favour of this theory. Galeazzo di Sanseverino was presumably portrayed by his friend Albrecht Dürer in 1502 in Nuremberg. The painting (or a copy after it?) was at some point in the Hickox collection in New York as Albrecht Dürer?, *Head of a Man* (c. 1510, oil on panel, New York, Charles V. Hickox Collection), in 1971–1972 on loan to the Metropolitan Museum New York.²⁵ I think that the portrayed man looks quite similar to the sitter in the Ambrosiana portrait, only older. We can see the unusually wide and square shape of the face, the strong square jaw, and the protruding nose oriented downwards, the short thick neck, brown-green eyes, and finally the characteristic shape of the mouth. In all probability this could be the same man, portrayed about twelve years later, aged 44. The chronicles of the period speak of Sanseverino at the court of Innsbruck as always dressed in black (as in the Dürer painting), and he is wearing black in the Ambrosiana portrait too. As communicated to me by Vogt-Lüerssen, he has a scar on his left eyebrow caused by a stone, documented in the chronicles reporting the historic siege of Novara in 1500. According to her, his hair and eyebrows have turned white and his face shows signs of suffering after some time of imprisonment.

In conclusion, we have to say that there is no evidence to prove that *La Bella Principessa* shows Bianca Giovanna Sforza, Ludovico's natural daughter. On the contrary, it is probable that another work, *Portrait of a Lady*, dated c. 1490 (but more likely 1496, Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana), is the true likeness of Bianca, while the companion painting shows her husband Galeazzo di Sanseverino. The profile of *La Bella Principessa* is also completely different from the likenesses of Bianca Maria Sforza and Beatrice d'Este, while there are no known portraits of Anna Sforza to compare it to.

The Warsaw *Sforziad* Hypothesis

The books of the *Sforziad* were written between 1473 and 1476 by Giovanni Simonetta, to commemorate the deeds of Francesco Sforza, Duke of Milan, between 1442 and 1466. It has been proposed by Martin Kemp that the drawing of *La Bella Principessa* was taken out of the luxury copy of the codex now in Warsaw. The National Library of Warsaw has one of the four copies printed on vellum, subtitled *Commentarii rerum gestarum Francisci Sfortiae*. Only the copy in Warsaw was signed in the frontispiece by Giovan Pietro Birago, on the edge of a vase in the bottom right margin, with the text: P[re]SB[yste]R IO[annes] PETR[us] BIRAGUS FE[cit] [Fig. 6]. This copy came from the Zamoyski Library. Wright, who at some point joined Kemp's art historical searches, wrote that 'during the 1490s, Ludovico (il Moro), over time, commissioned four unique copies of the Italian *Sforziad* deluxe presentation books on vellum, rather than paper, each one with border illuminations by Giovan Pietro Birago on the first page of the Simonetta text'.²⁶ According to Kemp's and Cotte's investigations in Poland, *La Bella Principessa* was supposedly inserted in the book as folio 8^r, before the frontispiece richly illuminated by Birago, where a leaf is missing. The vellum of *La Bella Principessa* allegedly also matched the vellum of the Warsaw manuscript. Kemp additionally wrote: 'it is likely that the portrait was removed during a rebinding of the *Sforziad*'²⁷, particularly the rebinding of Zamoyski books. In response to this argument, we have to ask: why was then the page slashed with a knife, as shown by the left edge of the vellum, where the knife slid? Surely there was no need for such a violent action, if the leaf was 'removed during a rebinding'. Let us now re-examine all the evidence of the *Sforziad* hypothesis by analysing three articles on the subject by Bogdan Horodyski²⁸, Elizabeth McGrath²⁹ and D. R. E. Wright.³⁰

Three well preserved copies of the *Sforziad* are respectively in London, Paris and Warsaw, and one badly damaged specimen from the library of the Sforza at Pavia is now preserved in the Uffizi in Florence (843 and 4423–4430). It is most interesting to compare the Warsaw copy with the copies in London and Paris. The first detailed study of *La Sforziada* in Warsaw, London and Paris was written by Horodyski in 1954. I will quote the Polish scholar extensively, because his iconographic reading of Birago's frontispiece contradicts the views on the Warsaw copy of the *Sforziad*, which are now being advanced.

Firstly, we must notice that in 1954 Horodyski found as many as 208 folios in the Warsaw *Sforziad*.³¹ Even assuming he also counted the blank folios, there are only 199 printed folios and three blank ones now, which make a total of 202 folios. Six folios are missing, unless Horodyski made a mistake. He wrote:

The first six pages (folios) are occupied by the prefaces and the dedicatory letter of the translator addressed to Ludovico Moro,

and the actual text begins on the beautifully decorated page (folio) 7, where there is also the title of the work.³²

This is consistent with what we find now, except that the frontispiece page is now marked in pencil as number 6, as the blank page at the beginning of the book is not counted. This in principle proves that since 1954 no pages from the beginning of the *Sforziad* have been removed, where Kemp hypothetically situated/inserted *La Bella Principessa* drawing as folio 8^r.

The London *Sforziad*

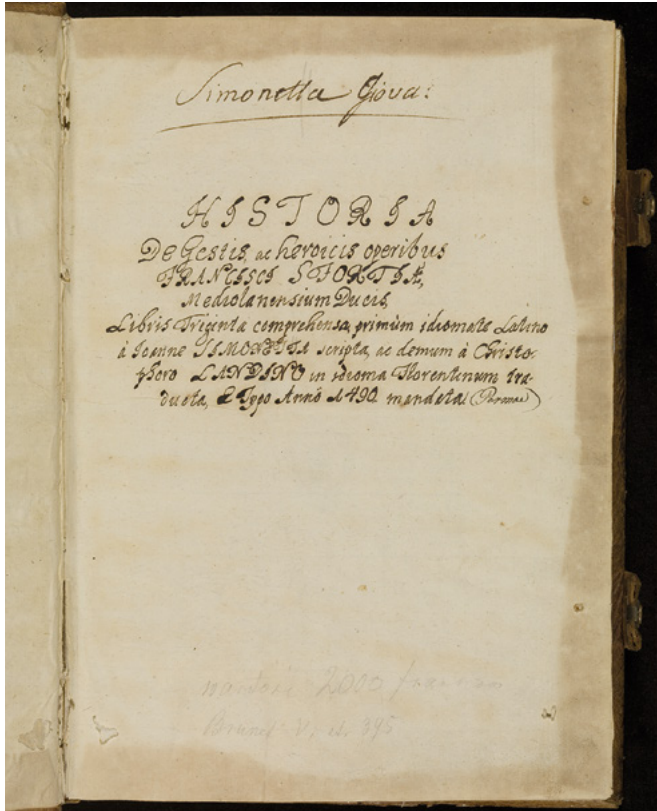
The first copy of the *Sforziad* is now preserved in the British Library (G 7251) in London, and is dated 1490. The copy in the British Library is very similar to the Warsaw one: it has 200 vellum leaves, and was printed in 1490 in Milan by Antonio Zarotto Parmesano. It also contains one richly illuminated frontispiece by Giovan Pietro Birago. Incidentally, the version in the British Library is the only one that retains its original splendid covers. According to Horodyski, the London copy belonged to Ludovico Il Moro, as the Birago frontispiece contained many references to Ludovico: his profile portrait in the right margin; the top margin showing a black man ('Moro'); his complicated coat of arms below; two hanging aspergillums – his personal emblem; and probably some allusions to his nephew Gian Galeazzo in the frivolous scene of putti, who have their eyes covered and their bottoms spanked: like Gian Galeazzo, 'who after all had his eyes covered and no humiliation spared'. It is to be noted that Horodyski did not find in the frontispiece any references to Ludovico's wife, Beatrice d'Este, or to their children. Wright, however, pointed out d'Este lilies in Ludovico's coat of arms, which might indeed be such a reference.

According to McGrath and Wright, the London copy of the *Sforziad* was made between 1491 and 1494, and presented by Ludovico to Beatrice d'Este on the birth of their son Maximilian, on 25 January 1493, although, in fact, there is no real proof of that. There are no references to the child in the frontispiece. On the other hand, we know that Ludovico married Beatrice d'Este in January 1491, so perhaps another plausible hypothesis could be that the London *Sforziad* was illuminated by Birago in 1490 for Ludovico and his wife, on the occasion of their wedding?

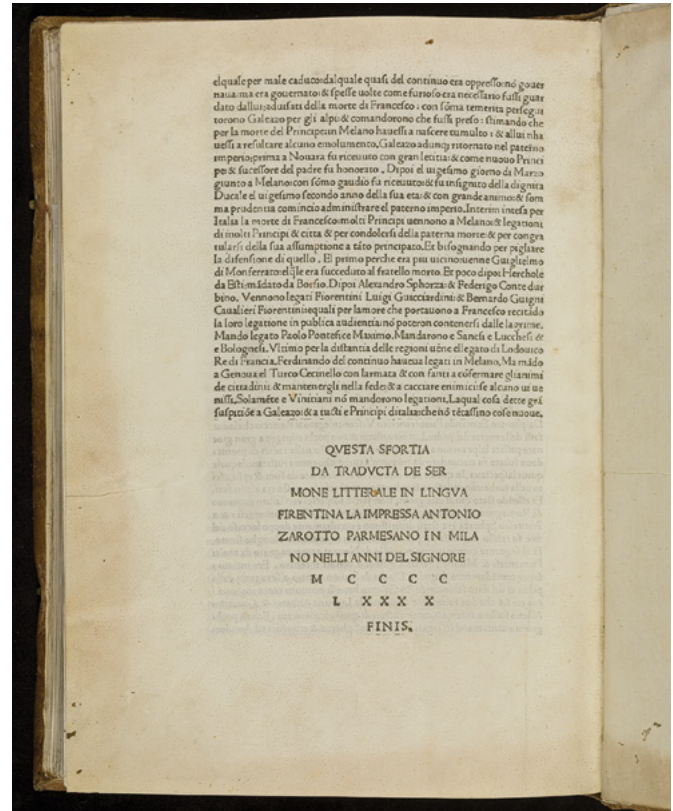
The Paris *Sforziad*

The second similar copy of the *Sforziad* is in Paris (Imprimés, Réserve, Vélins 724), also printed by Zarotto in 1490, and illuminated by Giovan Pietro Birago. It is now said to have been presented to Ludovico's nephew, Gian Galeazzo Sforza and his wife Isabella d'Aragona on the birth of their first son Francesco in 1491, so was made before Galeazzo's death on 21 October 1494. Horodyski also wrote that this copy without a doubt

6. Giovan Pietro Birago, Frontispiece to the *Sforziad*, Warsaw, National Library. Photo: The National Library of Poland



7. Front page of the Warsaw *Sforziad* annotated by hand, Warsaw, National Library. Photo: The National Library of Poland



8. Last page of the Warsaw *Sforziad*, dated 1490, Warsaw, National Library. Photo: The National Library of Poland

belonged to Gian Galeazzo, as there are references to him in Birago's illuminations, and it was once in the castle in Pavia. Obvious references to Gian Galeazzo are the three flaming torches (his emblem) and a medallion with his portrait. There are also two trees depicted: the weaker and the stronger (symbolising Galeazzo and Ludovico), and two smaller trees – two children with dark faces. Horodyski said on the matter of children:

Unquestionably these are two natural children of Ludovico, who at the time of creation of the miniature did not yet have a lawful wife. [...] These children are Leon, the son of an unknown mother, born c. 1476 (and thus fourteen years old in 1490) and Bianca Giovanna, daughter of Bernardina de Conradis [sic!], b[orn] c. 1482.³³

In the lower margin, we can see Ludovico and Gian Galeazzo, as well as a boat in a marine bay with probably the port of Genoa in the distance, which in 1488 returned under the sovereignty of Milan. In the boat, at the helm, we see a black man (Moro), and a passenger who is Gian Galeazzo. In view of

all the above, it transpires that the Paris copy of the *Sforziad* was *not* made on the occasion of Francesco's birth, since Horodyski points out that Galeazzo had no legitimate children at that time. The wedding of Gian Galeazzo and Isabella d'Aragona took place in 1489, just as Galeazzo and Bianca's. The book was illuminated by Birago in 1490, and another plausible hypothesis could be that the Paris *Sforziad* was presented by Ludovico to Gian Galeazzo as a wedding gift.

The Warsaw *Sforziad*

Wright wrote the following about the Warsaw copy of the *Sforziad*:

Bogan [sic!] Horodyski and Elizabeth McGrath have indicated that the Warsaw copy had to do with the 1496 wedding of Ludovico's young daughter Bianca, aged fourteen, to his favourite courtier and military commander Galeazzo Sanseverino, whose arms appear in the right and left borders. McGrath also saw in the mixed race couple on the left a reference to the bride and groom.³⁴

Effectively, McGrath wrote that the Warsaw copy of the *Sforziad* 'was almost certainly a gift from Ludovico on the occasion of the marriage of his daughter, Bianca to Galeazzo de Sanseverino in 1496'.³⁵ As pointed out by McGrath, the couple are depicted in the lower border on the left. But what was not mentioned is that Bianca looks a lot smaller than Galeazzo, more a child than a girl, a fact which could suggest that the *Sforziad* was presented to Galeazzo in 1490, not in 1496. More importantly, as we shall see later, Horodyski did not think that the Warsaw copy of the *Sforziad* was destined for Galeazzo di Sanseverino, but one of the offspring of Gian Galeazzo.

Wright identified the *imprese* (emblems) of the young couple Bianca and Galeazzo in the Birago frontispiece as: 'Gideon's fleece being wrung out by a pair of hands' (Galeazzo), and 'three interlocked diamond rings' (Bianca), yet as we will see further on, these emblems were identified very differently by Horodyski. Wright also noted emblems of many other personages from the Sforza family, such as Francesco, Galeazzo Maria, Gian Galeazzo, Bona of Savoy, Isabella d'Aragona, and others. Kemp took the whole matter further and wrote rather inaccurately: 'it seems almost certain that the portrait was made for the *Sforziad* that was specifically printed on vellum for the marriage of Bianca and Galeazzo in 1496'.³⁶

Yet we know that the Warsaw copy was printed and also sent/delivered ('mandata' [Parma]) in 1490, as indicated by the handwritten notice on one of the front pages dated 1490 [Fig. 7], and the last page of the *Sforziad* printed by Antonio Zarotto Parmesano in Milan in the year MCCCCLXXX (1490) [Fig. 8]. In fact, the wedding between Galeazzo di Sanseverino and Bianca Sforza took place not in 1496, as commonly stated (when the bride came of age and the marriage was consummated), but earlier, in December 1489, when she was still a child, and this date would also be more consistent with the date of the Warsaw copy of the *Sforziad* (1490). Why would Ludovico wait for six years (from 1490 to 1496) before offering the book, printed in 1490, as a wedding gift to Galeazzo di Sanseverino?

Perhaps we could find a pattern here, and although this is only a hypothesis, all these presentation copies illuminated by Giovan Pietro Birago might have been gifts for the Sforza family weddings, which closely followed in the years 1489–1491:

- Gian Galeazzo Sforza and Isabella d'Aragona in February 1489
- Galeazzo di Sanseverino and Bianca Sforza in December 1489 (or 10 January 1490)
- Ludovico Sforza and Beatrice d'Este in January 1491
- Anna Sforza and Alfonso I d'Este in January 1491.

The reasoning points to the Warsaw copy of the *Sforziad* printed by Zarotto and illuminated by Birago as being presented to Galeazzo di Sanseverino shortly after 1490–1491. But in 1490–1491, Bianca Sforza was only 8–9 years old (she was born

in 1482). This would make it impossible for her to be portrayed as *La Bella Principessa* in the drawing supposedly taken out of the Warsaw *Sforziad*. There is yet another hypothesis. Interestingly, Horodyski proposed an almost completely different iconographic reading of the Warsaw *Sforziad*, a fact which was not mentioned by Kemp or Wright. Horodyski saw in the Birago frontispiece the following symbols: the interconnected monograms of Gian Galeazzo and Ludovico; a crest with waves and a sailing boat operated by a black man (Moro); two hands holding a handkerchief probably filled with tears – and not the dewy fleece, supposed emblem of Galeazzo di Sanseverino; GZ monogram of Galeazzo or Gian Galeazzo; 'two stylized as if made of bronze dolphins at whose tongues hang three intertwined rings. This emblem was also used by Francesco Sforza'³⁷ – rather than the emblem of Bianca Sforza. He also noted a shield between the dolphins: in one field the stripes from the coat of arms of Aragon, in the second field half of the cross from the arms of Milan. I would like to add that the shield appears in the space where the portrait of the recipient of the *Sforziad* would be, as in the copies in Paris and London. The relevant effigy is not there, which is logically explained by Horodyski.

Horodyski, on the *Sforziad* in Warsaw:

It was unquestionably designed for the offspring of Gian Galeazzo and Isabella of Aragon. It is indicated by the crest formed of the halves of the coats-of-arms of Milan and Aragon. [...] What strikes us above all is that the boat in the lower right margin of the crest has only one passenger. [...] The figure of Gian Galeazzo is missing [...]. At the time of the making of the miniature Galeazzo was already dead. Confirmation can be seen in the broken shield with the monogram of the prince, and also the same initials fading away against the black hole at the top left margin of the decoration. In this case also becomes understandable the rain of tears flowing down to the handkerchief [...]. In this light, the fact that the black man in miniature is sitting on the sarcophagus becomes telling. [...] All these elements suggest that the illumination was made after the death of Galeazzo and thus after the date of 21 October 1494. What's more, we can presuppose that Galeazzo Sanseverino and Bianca Giovanna appearing in the miniature as a couple were indeed married at that time, not engaged to be married.³⁸

Horodyski speculated as to which child this copy of the *Sforziad* was intended for. We know that the manuscript probably came to Poland with Bona Sforza, Gian Galeazzo's daughter. This iconographic reading of the Warsaw *Sforziad* frontispiece by Horodyski is in my opinion the most plausible, because of the logical sequence of symbols, and it clearly excludes Galeazzo di Sanseverino as the intended recipient of the manuscript. There would thus be no reason to insert a picture of his wife Bianca in the manuscript.

Technicalities of the Warsaw *Sforziad*

I was able to examine the *Sforziad* firsthand during my visit (summer 2012) to the National Library (Biblioteka Narodowa) in Warsaw.³⁹ There are, in my opinion, more arguments of technical nature against the Warsaw *Sforziad* hypothesis.

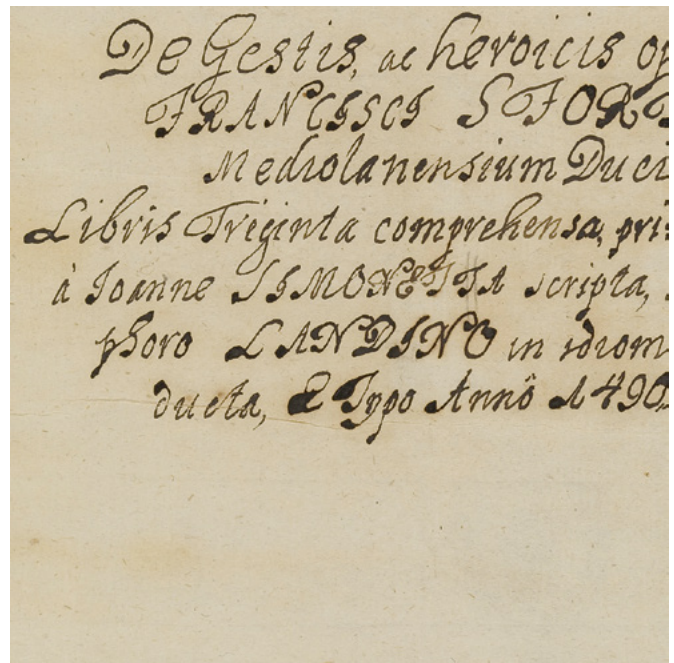
First of all, none of the other copies of the *Sforziad* have any illuminations/drawings other than by Giovan Pietro Birago, and they are all similar and traditional in style and technique. As we know, Leonardo never worked as a miniaturist, and had he attempted such an experimental technique of illumination as *trois crayons/pastel* on vellum (a support he never used) someone would have mentioned it. The coloured chalk/pastel technique, as every artist knows, is completely unsuitable for the illumination of books, for chalk/pastel gets transferred to the neighbouring page and is very delicate. Kemp and Cotte's reconstruction of the insertion of the drawing in the Warsaw *Sforziad* looks unrealistic, as it is facing a printed page. If ever there was such an illumination in the book, it would surely have to face a blank page or be done in another technique, such as tempera.

The style of *La Bella Principessa*, without borders and truncated at the bottom (the pattern of the dress is abruptly cut), in pen and ink and chalks also looks entirely inconsistent in colouring and style with Birago's illuminations on the next page, as well as the overall style of the book. Furthermore, there are no corresponding references to the portrait/sitter in the text of the book, as was the case for the only comparable full-page illuminated portraits of Massimiliano Sforza and his father Ludovico Maria Sforza, attributed to Ambrogio de Predis, also dated c. 1496–1499. De Predis, however, was not just a painter, but also a miniaturist, unlike Leonardo. His illuminations in *Grammatica*, the manuscript commissioned by Ludovico Sforza for the education of his son, are executed in a more suitable technique of tempera on vellum. Moreover, Ludovico's portrait has a border and corresponds well in colour (repetition of the colours) and design with the facing page. Also the facing page in content refers to the image, as it is a sonnet extolling Ludovico's glory and his image. Incidentally, the style of de Predis' illuminated profile portrait was described in the National Gallery's Leonardo exhibition catalogue in London as 'conservative' and 'more impervious to Leonardesque innovation that once supposed'.⁴⁰ Yet this strict archaic and conservative profile view is arguably quite comparable in its rigidity to *La Bella Principessa*.

More importantly, the colouring and the texture of the drawing's vellum looks quite different from the pages of the *Sforziad*; in the former it appears as fairly rough animal hide of yellow colouring, clearly showing follicles and a number of leather-like defects [Fig. 9], while in the book the vellum/parchment is a lot lighter in colour, quite smooth and looks more like fine paper [Fig. 10]. Kemp justified the vellum's yellow colouring with the



9. Fragment of the «La Bella Principessa» vellum, showing one hole on the left well away from the edge. Photo: Wikipedia



10. Smooth and white *Sforziad*'s vellum. Photo: The National Library of Poland

following: 'light yellow background (vellum) probably prepared with gum arabic, which may have been tinted with dilute burnt sienna'.⁴¹ But he did not explain the difference in the texture of the vellum, about which he inexplicably said: 'Indeed, in the case of the Warsaw book, it is possible to demonstrate that [...] the vellum of the portrait closely matches in all respects the physical characteristics of the remaining sheets in the first quire'.⁴²

I have carefully examined the vellum of the *Sforziad* in Warsaw and it is well prepared and smooth, unlike the drawing's support. Admittedly, the drawing was varnished/coloured and fixed onto a wood panel with glue, so its texture might be 'disguised', or perhaps even altered, yet the leather-like aspect remains, and the follicles and defects are still well visible. Fortunately the rough aspect of the drawing's support was also duly noted by Nicholas Turner in his *Statement*, quoted in full in Silverman's book, when he said: 'The artist has successfully exploited the pitted texture of the material in his rendering of the figure's flesh and clothes'.⁴³ The word 'pitted' refers to smallish craters/holes called 'pits', thus to the uneven aspect of the animal hide on the rough, hair side. This important physical aspect of the vellum was also discussed by Cristina Geddo, who also noticed and underlined the roughness of the support, and furthermore pointed out that the drawing was made on the wrong side of the vellum:

Besides the presence of the follicles, the rough unworked surface of the hide and its darkened, somewhat yellowish colour show that the portrait was made on the outer surface of the skin (formerly fur-covered) and not on the inner one covering the flesh, which was aesthetically the superior of the two and commonly used as a support for written documents. This observation opens up the possibility that the verso of the parchment may have writing on it, a point that could be verified were it to be lifted from its present backing in some future (and much hoped for) restoration.⁴⁴

This could of course also indicate that the vellum was not originally intended for the drawing, but was 'recycled' once the superior skin side was used.

So not only is the vellum rough and crudely prepared, but the drawing is also unusually made on the inferior hair side. The Warsaw *Sforziad* vellum has no obvious 'wrong' side, as both sides of the pages are covered in print and fairly smooth. It should be noted that the illumination by Birago was made on the superior, skin side of the vellum, as it was smoother. It is surprising that Kemp never mentioned or explained the rough aspect of the support, especially since photos in his book, taken in raking light, clearly demonstrate it.

Moreover, Geddo spotted hand writing on the other smooth side of the vellum, which for some reason nobody else has mentioned since:

In any case one is here dealing with a parchment or part of the recycled codex: one can deduce this from the superimposed numbers visible through the parchment above the central decoration of the costume, which should be decipherable, like others written in pen, such as very pale inscription visible along the upper border of the sheet and the little winged dragon – at least this is what it seems – in the lower left corner. This feature, too, counts in favour of an attribution to Leonardo, who, even though he has never to our knowledge used a parchment support in his work, was in the habit of re-using the paper on which he wrote or drew.⁴⁵

What was written on the verso? Why was it not investigated further or even mentioned by other scholars?

Also, there is an additional problem with the vellum's dimensions. The Warsaw *Sforziad*'s pages are 33.8 cm high, and were trimmed at some point during rebinding (see the *Sforziad* online, with the ruler applied to the annotated page. The National Library's description online mentions 34 × 23.8 cm, I measured it and it shows 33.8 cm). The drawing of *La Bella Principessa* is only 33 cm high, so noticeably smaller. The difference is 0.8 cm, which is significant enough. Kemp inaccurately wrote about the dimensions of the *Sforziad* in Warsaw:

the dimensions of the vellum sheets vary from 33.0 to 33.4 cm in height [...]. We can therefore say that the current dimensions of the portrait and the folios are very close. However, as we shall see, we need to take into account the possible trimming of the folios of the book and the portrait during rebinding.⁴⁶

But, as noted by Geddo, 'the edges (of the drawing) seem untrimmed, with the exception of that to the left, which has been cut crudely'.⁴⁷ Indeed, this is true, as both left and right edges of the sheet of vellum of *La Bella Principessa* appear uneven, not just the left one, supposedly slashed from the manuscript with a knife. If they were untrimmed, why are their dimensions smaller than the pages of the *Sforziad*?

Moreover, Kemp admitted that both the Paris and London folios of the *Sforziad* are of the same size (35 × 24.5 cm), as was most probably the Warsaw copy before trimming. Yet the drawing is quite a lot smaller (33 cm high), and was clearly untrimmed (the edges are irregular), so logically it could not have been part of the significantly larger (by 2 cm) folios of the *Sforziads*.

Foliation and Stitching Holes

Kemp wrote the following about the binding of the *Sforziad*:

Indeed, in the case of the Warsaw book, it is possible to demonstrate that one folio and a complete sheet have been removed, and that the vellum of the portrait closely matches in all respects

the physical characteristics of the remaining sheets in the first quire. The most notable match is between the stitch holes in the vellum of the portrait and those in the book.⁴⁸

But further on he added:

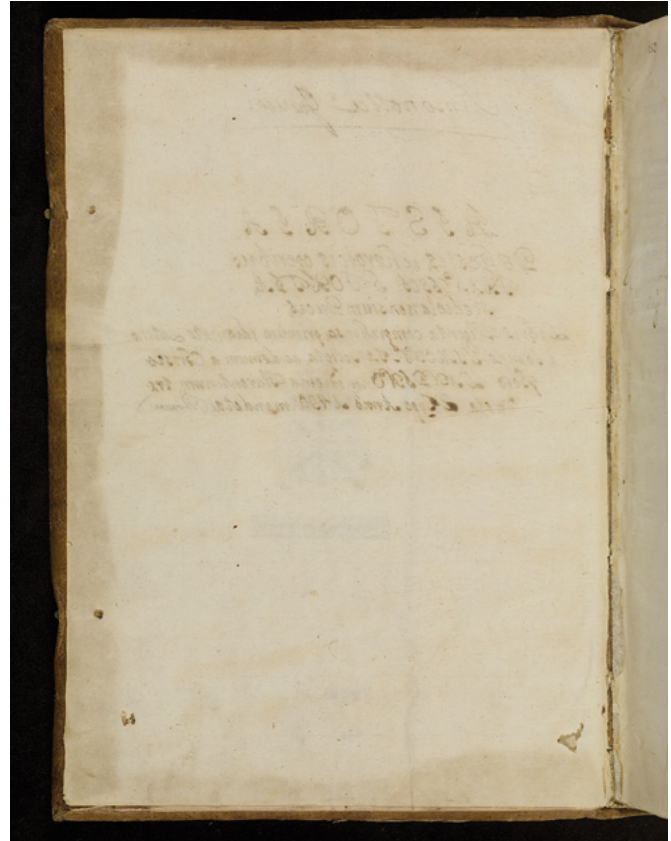
There is an obvious difference. The current stitching of the volume involves five holes, whereas there are only three holes now visible along the left margin of *La Bella Principessa*. However these three holes correspond very closely to the corresponding ones in the book. Our digital superimposition of 3 holes in the book on the portrait's three holes is visually compelling, not least because the holes are not spaced at perfectly regular intervals. The different number of stitching holes may result from the untidy way the left margin of the portrait folio has been cut, or from two intermediate stitches being added when the book was later rebound in standard Zamoyski livery. The former explanation is the more likely.⁴⁹

Considering the difference in the height of the page (0.8 cm), there must be some difference in the positioning of the holes. Moreover, it is not quite true that the holes in the drawing or the Warsaw *Sforziad* are irregularly spaced. If we examine the digital copy online, and I have also measured the distances between the holes in Warsaw, we can see that the holes are fairly regularly spaced, at a distance of about 5.5 cm [Fig. 11]. The stitching in the Warsaw book has five holes. In Paris it has seven holes, but it was rebound. In London the binding has five holes, which seems to be the norm for all the copies of the *Sforziad*, although Kemp says that it has been re-sown. Yet the London *Sforziad* has its original covers, so the binding could be original. There is therefore no reason why the drawing of *La Bella Principessa* would have only three holes. Also the holes in the drawing are quite large and away from the edge of the vellum. If the drawing were to be inserted in the *Sforziad*, it would surely be less wide than the other pages.

Kemp and Cotte have also tried to work out where the Leonardo drawing might have fitted in the Warsaw *Sforziad*. Their hypothesis was illustrated (online) by three figures showing the composition of the first two quires (collections of sheets) in all the three manuscripts. Kemp wrote:

It is apparent from the comparison of the first quires of the Warsaw and Paris versions that a complete blank sheet sheet [sic!] (2 folios) is missing from the former, as well as the page that we noted had been excised.

This is not quite what can be seen online. The first blank folio is there; it is the one with the hand-written notice. The next folio is blank on the verso and has text on the recto, just like in the Paris and London copies. Kemp:



11. The stitching in the Warsaw *Sforziad*. Photo: The National Library of Poland

The portrait [sic!] would thus have been located on folio 8r, with its blank side (8v) facing the Birago illumination. The portrait [sic!] itself would have been faced by a blank page (7v).

Then:

The single, glued folio at the start of the quire may originally been the other half of the portrait sheet (folios 1 and 8) or of the other mainly blank sheet (folios 2 and 7). The former appears more likely. The blank facing pages were introduced in both cases to avoid the pressing of the illuminations against pages of printed text. There are indeed no signs of pigment transfer on to the printed pages in the present first quire in the Warsaw book.

If we look at the pattern of the placement of the folios and Birago's illuminations in the three codices in Paris, London and Warsaw, we can see that they are identical, except for some missing folios in the Warsaw *Sforziad*, and one blank sheet added at

a later date in the London one. The general (and logical) principle is that the first quires all start with one blank folio, and then one folio blank on the verso, and printed on the recto. Then they end with two completely blank folios to precede the Birago illumination, which starts the next quire. This is for the pigments not to transfer onto the next page. The blank pages (fols. 7 & 8) are present in the London and Paris copies, but are effectively missing in Warsaw, so the Birago illumination faces a printed page.

There is, however, no valid reason as to why Leonardo's drawing would replace one blank page, since this was not the case for the other two similar manuscripts, which are all identical in their system of illuminations by Birago. It would also surely not face a printed page. All the copies of the *Sforziad* were presumably commissioned for special occasions by Ludovico II Moro, but none had any such additional portraits. Of course the removed blank pages could have been re-used by anyone at any time, if cut out from the codex. However, the texture of the *La Bella Principessa* vellum is different from the Warsaw *Sforziad*, as we have described above.

It is worth noting that the drawing's vellum was C-14 dated rather widely 1440–1650, which according to Kemp 'greatly diminishes the possibility of the portrait being a clever forgery'.⁵⁰ I would like to disagree with this opinion, as a blank folio removed from a period manuscript would be the perfect material for making a forgery or an imitation.

Jolanta Sokółowska from the Old Prints Department of the National Library in Warsaw kindly provided me with information as to which folios of the *Sforziad* are missing: 'in the first quire the last folio (blank); in the last quire two folios – the first one printed and the last corresponding one blank'. Confusingly, another missing folio was reported by Peter Silverman in the 'Miracle in Warsaw' chapter of his book, whilst recounting his visit to Warsaw's National Library. Firstly he admitted: 'Martin [Kemp] had surmised that the Leonardo portrait would have been placed either at the very beginning or the very end of the book, but after careful examination we could find no trace of a cut page in either place'.⁵¹ This contradicts what supposedly happened later. Then he added:

We slowly continued to view each page, but there was no sign of a missing page. [...] But then Zawisza [Anna Zawisza, head of manuscripts – ann. K. P.] turned page 161. [...] There before our incredulous eyes, was what seemed to be the missing link, the element we longed to find: a remnant of a cut and extracted page of vellum that was the same darkish yellow as *La Bella Principessa*. [...] We measured the undulation of the remnant, and it corresponded exactly. [...] David filmed the historic moment. [...] Zawisza [...] murmured how unhappy she was that she'd never noticed the missing page, now so glaringly obvious from the protruding remnant. She pointed out that the page had been cut out after the manuscript had been rebound.⁵²

This is not quite correct; what was showing on page 161 was part of the new binding, also visible in many other places.

In conclusion, we must say that the most likely iconographic reading of the Birago frontispiece in the Warsaw *Sforziad* by Horodyski does not point to Galeazzo di Sanseverino and Bianca Sforza as the intended recipients of the book, but to one of the offspring of Gian Galeazzo, after his death, possibly Bona Sforza. There would therefore be no reason to insert a picture of Sanseverino's wife Bianca in the codex.

As to the missing leaf or two in the first quire of the Warsaw copy of the *Sforziad*, they were originally left blank in all the three codices, and were inserted in order to accommodate Birago's frontispieces, as in the other copies in London and Paris.

The style of *La Bella Principessa* drawing is quite different from the rest of the illuminations in the book, and there are no references to the portrait/sitter in the text. More importantly, the rather fine white vellum of the Warsaw *Sforziad* does not match the rough texture and colour of the drawing, and the pages are taller. As the drawing was apparently untrimmed, it was never as large as the original leaf of the *Sforziad*. The portrait of *La Bella Principessa* was also most unusually executed on the inferior hair side of the vellum, unlike Birago's illuminations, which were painted on the smooth superior side. It is hard to believe that this would happen in the case of a work by Leonardo. Moreover, there are only three stitch holes instead of five, as was probably common to all the copies of the *Sforziad*.

In view of all the above the hypothesis of *La Bella Principessa* and the Warsaw *Sforziad* has to be considered unfounded.

Technique and Style of *La Bella Principessa* in Comparison to Leonardo's Authentic Works

The unusually complicated mixed technique of execution of *La Bella Principessa*, which looks more like a painting than a drawing, differs from Leonardo's known practices, as does the exceptional support of vellum. Coloured chalks were, however, used by him in the *Portrait of Isabella d'Este*, c. 1499–1500, Musée du Louvre, Paris [Fig. 12], but with a considerably different effect. His pupils at a later date also used coloured chalks, for example Giovan Antonio Boltraffio in *Portrait of a Woman, so-called Isabella d'Aragona* (c. 1498–1502, 54.4 × 40.4 cm, black chalk, charcoal, and chalks of various colours, washed with white on prepared paper, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana). The use of the medium was in both cases quite different from the careful/dry and formal technique of *La Bella Principessa*. It was used to produce the effect of *sfumato* and all the drawings looked unfinished and had few details in place.

In his revised version of the book *Leonardo* (2012), Kemp has tried to justify this newly rediscovered Leonardo's technique:

The technique is exceptional for Leonardo (or for anyone else at that time), but we know that he was planning to ask Jean Perréal about 'the method of dry colouring' with chalks in which the French specialised. Jean had been in the entourage of the French king, Charles VIII, when the French armies passed through Milan in 1494.⁵³

Kemp also mentioned this overly complicated technique for the period, as an 'unusually wide range of graphic media comprising pen and brown ink, black and red chalk, and extensive bodycolour'.⁵⁴ Oddly, he omitted to mention the prominently featuring white chalk. It is also strange that he did not consider that the drawing might have been retouched and repainted at a later time.

First of all, it has to be said that no portrait by Jean Perréal in coloured chalks exists. As we have seen, the date of 1494 would be too late in view of all the above, but there is yet another problem with this dating. Jean Perréal [Jehan de Paris] (c. 1455–1530) is known to have come in contact with Leonardo not in 1494, but in 1499, when he arrived in Milan with the French and King Louis XII. Perréal's first documented sojourn in Italy dates to autumn 1499.⁵⁵ According to P. Lavallée: 'the pastel is a French invention, at least that is what can be inferred from the testimony of Leonard da Vinci, who learned from Jean Perréal, who came to Milan in 1499, following King Louis XII, the mode of dry colouring'.⁵⁶ The date 1499 is indeed quoted by most sources. Kemp admitted that 'The "Ligny Memorandum" is conventionally dated 1499, but the circumstances fit better with Charles VIII's ultimately ill-fated expedition to Naples in 1494'.⁵⁷ Yet the note in the Codex Atlanticus, known to Leonardists as the Ligny Memorandum, suggests that in 1499 Leonardo was planning to follow the French general, Prince Ligny, from Rome to Naples. Incidentally, coloured chalks were used by Leonardo in the *Portrait of Isabella d'Este*, c. 1499–1500. Both these facts seem to confirm a later date of 1499, as the year when Leonardo met Jean Perréal. But this dating would be far too late for *La Bella Principessa*'s style.

The often quoted passage (fol. 669r of *Codex Atlanticus*, Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana) reads as follows:

Get from Jean de Paris the method of colouring *a secco* and the way of white salt, and how to make *coated paper*; single and many double ones; and his box of colours; learn to work flesh colours in tempera [...].

The original text in Italian, according to Kemp: 'Piglia da Gian de Paris il modo di colorire a secco e'l modo del sale bianco e del fare le carte impastate, sole e in molti doppi, e la sua casetta de'colori'. His own translation into English: 'Get from Jean de Paris the method of dry colouring and the method of white salt, and how to make *coated sheets*; single and many

doubles; and his box of colours [...]'. As we can see, the original word 'paper' (*carte*) was replaced by Kemp with the more general 'sheet', which in his view could also mean vellum. Yet '*le carte impastate*' specifically refers to paper, to paste-board/cardboard ('cartone') sheets or coated/tinted paper. Here is the relevant definition in *Dizionario delle origini, invenzioni e scoperte nelle arti, nelle scienze...*: 'Si fabbrica pure anticamente in Italia un cartone composto di piu carte impastate insieme [...]'.⁵⁸ ('Formerly the paste-board [cardboard] composed of paper sheets pasted together was fabricated in Italy [...]'). The definition of paste-board: a thin firm board made of sheets of paper pasted together or pressed paper pulp. This reading does not allow for any references to vellum in the Leonardo's note.

It has to be said that the surface of the drawing looks rather overworked in terms of the overly complex mixture of techniques and strokes (perhaps it was retouched at a later date?), and even appears 'messy' in the hair area. In the region of the ear hidden under the hair, there is also a patch of parallel hatching, which is unjustified. As for the ear itself, the execution of which Kemp described in his book as Leonardo's subtle observation, it is surely wrongly proportioned, in comparison to the facial features. Leonardo's manuscripts determined all the correct proportions of the human face, and he said this about the ear: 'The ear is exactly as long as the nose', fact which was for instance illustrated in his anatomical drawing, *Study of Proportions* (c. 1490, Venice, Galleria dell'Accademia).

Yet the outline of the ear of *La Bella Principessa* is longer than her nose. It should finish on the level of the base of the nose, but ends lower.

It should also be noted that such a partially concealed by the hair ear also features in another Leonardo drawing *Head of a Woman*, c. 1488–1490 [Fig. 13], which could be potentially significant. In this case, however, the ear is correctly of the same length as the nose. Other differences between the two portraits include the more advanced three-quarter view of the sitter in the Louvre drawing, and the feeling of movement, so different from the rigidity of the profile of *La Bella Principessa*. Indeed, the pose of the latter is static and stilted, unlike other drawings by the master, which are spontaneous and natural. The degree of finish is also too high for him, with a 'top to bottom' monotonous precision of execution. As we know, most of Leonardo's drawings (and paintings) are unfinished, displaying his characteristic *non finito*.

Incidentally, there are other anatomical anomalies in *La Bella Principessa* drawing. The nose is too short and the neck is too long, if we compare it for instance to Leonardo's *Portrait of a Woman in Profile* (c. 1489–1490, metal point on pale buff prepared paper, 32 × 20 cm, Royal Collection, Windsor), or to the previously mentioned *Portrait of Isabella d'Este* from Paris. In fact, these two drawings should form the template for comparisons with *La Bella Principessa*.



12. Leonardo da Vinci, «Portrait of Isabella d'Este», c. 1499–1500, black, red and ochre chalk heightened with white, on paper, 61 × 46.5 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: © RMN–Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre)/Thierry Le Mage



13. Leonardo da Vinci, «Head of a Woman», c. 1488–1490, metal point heightened with white on grey prepared paper, National Gallery, Parma. Photo: © Archives Alinari, Florence, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais/Georges Tatge



a.



b.

14. Comparison of Leonardo da Vinci's, «Bust of a Warrior in Profile», 1475–1480, silverpoint, London, British Museum (a), with «La Bella Principessa» (b) (as in Fig. 1). Photo: © Trustees of the British Museum (a)

The comparison with the *Portrait of Isabella d'Este* is very telling indeed, and shows irreconcilable differences, even though both drawings make use of coloured chalks. The execution of *La Bella Principessa* is hard and formal (the line of the profile is uniform and regular), unlike the *sfumato* and softness of contours found in the *Portrait of Isabella d'Este*. The latter also displays ease of movement, Leonardo's usual *non-finito*, face in profile but bust in three-quarter view, subtlety of colouring, shading on the inside of the forms, rather than the outside of the profile (a significant difference!), non-idealised and individual facial features, and an air of mystery and vagueness typical of the artist. Additionally, the Paris drawing had a clear function and definition, as it was a preparatory cartoon pricked for transfer onto another support.

Such comparisons show that the spirit of Leonardo is clearly missing in *La Bella Principessa*. Moreover, the latter does not

fit into any category of drawings known to Leonardo: it is not a sketch, it is not a cartoon, and it is not a preparatory study or an anatomical drawing. As to painted portraits by Leonardo, none are in full profile, unlike those of his pupils such as de Predis or Boltraffio. Moreover, the full profile composition (both face and upper body) would be too archaic for Leonardo in the 1490s, as all his female profile portraits have the face in profile and the bust in three-quarter view. Kemp also noticed this 'retrograde' aspect of the portrait: 'If the subject of Leonardo's drawing is Bianca it is likely to date from 1495–96. In style, it seems at first sight to belong with his earlier works'.⁵⁹ In fact, the only full profile portrait by Leonardo known is a much earlier and formal *Bust of a Warrior in Profile* [Fig. 14].

We also should compare *La Bella Principessa* to Leonardo's supposedly contemporary *Portrait of a Woman in Profile*,

c. 1489–1490 [Fig. 15]. This is the most similar looking drawing by the master, but the shading is again on the inside of the profile, as in the two Paris drawings. Moreover, in the Windsor drawing the bust is also shown in three quarters, and the drawing looks unfinished and spontaneous. Also the profile itself is individual, and not conventionally beautiful, unlike *La Bella Principessa*, which shows an idealized ‘sweet’ face. The eye is practically identical though, and such close similarity between the eyes is admittedly odd in two such different sitters. Could this indicate that the drawing in Windsor was used as a model for *La Bella Principessa*?

This is a plausible hypothesis, since the back contour of the neck which is enlarged/modified in the Windsor drawing, was also enlarged in *La Bella Principessa*, in the same place and to a similar width. The difference between the two profiles is that the nose is shorter and straighter in *La Bella Principessa*, and her chin less sloping. The fact that the bust was modified to show the full profile, might have affected the original length of the neck, which is now arguably too long.

The left-handed shading was an important argument in ascribing the drawing to Leonardo, even though it could clearly be imitated, as emphasized by Berenson:

The stroke is invariably from left to right, with the exception of such shading as imperatively demands the counter-stroke. Morelli was the first to draw the necessary conclusion from this observation. [...] It does not, of course, follow that the direction of the lines is, by itself, a sufficient test of authenticity in the case of a sketch ascribed to Leonardo. [...] There are a number of Leonardesque drawings in which the stroke is from left to right, yet certainly they are not Leonardo's. They are out-and-out forgeries, or slavish copies, or else the work of pupils [like Melzi or perhaps Salai] who in their enthusiasm imitated this among the other mannerisms of the master.⁶⁰

Was Berenson also referring to this particular drawing, which he might have seen in the 1930s in the Marchig collection? Nonetheless, opinions were lately expressed that only Leonardo was left-handed and none of his pupils, so only he could have executed *La Bella Principessa*. Carmen C. Bambach: ‘The effect of these copies, though neat, seems always dry and forced, and the lines in the hatching often appear fine and scratchy’.⁶¹ Also Berenson noticed in such cases a hardness, a machine-like precision in the line (also detectable in this drawing), and called such works ‘equally faithful to the stroke, but equally devoid of Leonardo's quality’.

It has to be emphasised that all Leonardo's female drawn portraits have the shading on the inside of the contour of the face, unlike *La Bella Principessa*, where the shading is on the outside of the profile. In fact, the shading around the outside contours of the face in the drawing, although left-handed, looks

dry, timid and mechanic, and does not seem to play any integral role in the portrait. Oddly, the shading in the drawing is also only to the front of the face, not the back or top of the head.

The profile of *La Bella Principessa* drawing could perhaps have been ‘inspired’ by a sculpture, rather than another drawing or a painting. *Bust of Beatrice d'Este*, c. 1491 (Musée du Louvre, Paris), by Gian Cristoforo Romano (c. 1465–1512) in profile oddly resembles *La Bella Principessa*, even if the sitter is clearly a different person [Fig. 16]. It also shows an almost identical *coazzone* and a similar hair style. The sculpture, as well as the two previously mentioned drawings (*Head of a Woman* and *Portrait of Isabella d'Este*), which show similarities with *La Bella Principessa*, are all in the Louvre. We know that the drawing was once in France, as witnessed by the exportation stamps at the back of the panel.

Another significant factor in this hypothesis is the knot design on the sitter's dress, also called *fantasia dei vinci*, and described in the attribution as typical of Leonardo. But a *vinci* pattern can also be seen in Ambrogio de Predis' portrait in the Ambrosiana, probably the true portrait of Bianca Giovanna Sforza, as explained by Cartwright:

The subject is of special interest, because this same pattern is repeated in the sleeves of Ambrogio de Predis' portrait of Lodovico's fair young daughter Bianca, which must have been painted about this time, and was probably adopted at the wish of Beatrice, who was fondly attached to her youthful step-daughter. Again, this same linked tracery or ‘fantasia dei vinci’, as it is called in Beatrice and her sister's letters, is to be seen both in the decorations that adorn the ceiling of a hall in the Castello of Milan, and on the vaulting of the sacristy in St. Maria delle Grazie. And as Mr. Müntz has lately pointed out, this same interlaced ornament, or *vinci* in which the Belgian professor, M. Errera, sees a play upon the great painter's name, forms the motive of the famous circular engravings bearing the words ‘Academia Leonardi Vinci’ which have given rise to so many conjectures as to the existence of that mysterious institution. All these repetitions of the pattern invented by Niccolo da Correggio, and adopted by Beatrice d'Este for her wedding robe, show how fashionable the ‘fantasia dei vinci’ became at the Milanese court, and lead us to imagine that Leonardo himself may have had some part in the original design.⁶²

Martin Kemp himself confirmed this fact in his book, *Leonardo Da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man*: ‘Nowadays we tend to associate the interlock motif too exclusively with Leonardo's individual proclivity for such forms, but we should remember that this pattern of design was all the fashionable rage in the d'Este-Sforza circle at this time. [...] To some extent it became common property’.⁶³



15. Leonardo da Vinci, «Portrait of a Woman in Profile», c. 1489–1490, metal point on pale buff prepared paper, 32 × 20 cm, Windsor, Royal Collection. Photo: © Royal Collection Trust, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2013



16. Gian Cristoforo Romano, «Bust of Beatrice d'Este», c. 1491, marble, height 59 cm, Paris, Musée du Louvre. Photo: © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre)/Stéphane Maréchal

What is even more interesting is that the knot on the sleeve of *La Bella Principessa* differs from knots in Leonardo's paintings and drawings. The closest match found by Kemp was with the well-known *Knot Design for the 'Accademia Leonardi Vi[n]ci'*, illustrated in his book.⁶⁴ But Leonardo's design had four loops at the top, instead of one, as in *La Bella Principessa*, and it had no 'dots' between the lines. I have found an overall closer match for the pattern on *La Bella Principessa* precisely in the sleeve of the Beatrice d'Este sculpted bust. Beatrice's head dress had similar dots inserted between the patterns. Yet such unusual dots cannot be traced in any of Leonardo's works (to my knowledge).

As to the head net found on *La Bella Principessa*, it also looks surprisingly similar to the one depicted in the *Portrait of a Lady (Bianca Giovanna Sforza?)* by de Predis, and it could have been based on it. Carlo Pedretti said the following about *La Bella Principessa*:

Certainly, the insidious possibility of a fake must always be considered, bearing in mind the ability of an artist like Giuseppe Bossi (1777–1815), a noteworthy Leonardo scholar, who assembled a distinguished collection of drawings by the artist, now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.⁶⁵

When discussing the hairstyle or clothes in the drawing, we ought to mention an article by the Polish scholar Prof. Zdzisław Żygulski Jr, written in relation to Leonardo's *Lady with an Ermine (Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani)*, c. 1489–1490 (Czartoryski Museum in Cracow, currently on display at the Wawel Castle).⁶⁶ Prof. Żygulski rightly points out that Leonardo was 'reluctant' to paint profile portraits. He also describes in details the specific head covering called *el tranzado* (in dialect *coazzone*) depicted in the drawing. It was derived from the Spanish fashion and popular at the court of Ludovico Sforza in Milan in the 1490s thanks to Beatrice d'Este's interest in new styles of clothing (she was described by her contemporaries as 'the inventor of new fashions'). The fashionable smooth hairstyle with a parting in the middle and a long plait at the back included, among other things, a loose hair strand on each side of the face, which is missing in the drawing. Another sartorial element popular at the time was the Spanish *sbernia*, a mantle draped on the left shoulder. Such a cloak is featured in the *Bust of Beatrice d'Este* by Romano, as well as de Predis' portrait, and perhaps in *La Bella Principessa*, as her left sleeve. At the time, sleeves would be separate pieces attached to the main bodice by ribbons, which is not the case here. More importantly, the vertical opening in the mantle featured in the Ambrosiana portrait, as well as in the *Lady with an Ermine*, had a clear purpose, and allowed for the arm to pass through it. The too small opening/hole in *La Bella Principessa's* sleeve/*sbernia* has no such a function and is a purely decorative element. It is important to underline

that the opening in *La Bella Principessa's sbernia* does not fulfil its role as an arm-hole. Could this 'misunderstanding' be called an anachronism?

Interestingly, Prof. Żygulski also noted in his paper that there were no depictions of Italian women in Milan dressed in Spanish fashion around 1483 (Vezzosi and Turner dated *La Bella Principessa* c. 1481–1482), as all the portraits showing such sartorial features were created around the 1490s or a little later.⁶⁷ We came to an important point here. Both Vezzosi and Turner not only identified the sitter differently to Kemp (as Bianca Maria, not Bianca Giovanna Maria), but also dated the drawing differently (c. 1481–1482, as opposed to c. 1494–1496 proposed by Kemp). This has not been remarked upon. Yet the view expressed by Turner in his *Statement*, endorsing the opinion of Prof. Alessandro Vezzosi, was perfectly clear:

The *Portrait* has been dated around 1481–1482, that is in the time shortly after Leonardo's transfer to Milan from Florence. [...] There are two strong points in favour of such a dating – the drawing's style and the sitter's dress. [...] The purity of the woman's silhouette set against the light background, suggestive of a paper cutout, recalls the equally uncompromising but more complex outline of the *Warrior with Helmet and Breastplate* (c. 1472) in the British Museum [...].⁶⁸

Here Turner failed to notice the conspicuous absence of shading around the *Warrior* profile, but he duly added 'the *Portrait* is dissimilar in actual detail from the *Warrior* in almost every respect'.⁶⁹ The early style Turner refers to is Leonardo's first Florentine period, when 'he was experimenting in the drawing of different human profiles. [...] Whatever its date, the present *Portrait* depends heavily in mood and appearance on [...] Leonardo's early Florentine experience'.⁷⁰

But the earlier dating c. 1481–1482 of the drawing would exclude Bianca Giovanna Sforza as the sitter, as she was too young at that time, and still unmarried to Galeazzo.

These contradictions as to the iconography, style and dating of the drawing are significant enough, and demonstrate the many weaknesses of this attribution.

Forensic Evidence

I will not address the fingerprint evidence here, allegedly uncovered on *La Bella Principessa* by Peter Paul Biro, the Montreal-based forensic art expert, and considered insufficient even by Kemp. Let us only quote what he said in an interview for *ArtInfo*, on 17 October 2011:

I had data on fingerprints and finger marks in other Leonardo paintings, and he said one of these matched – not astoundingly, because it's just the tip of a finger, and one doesn't rely on

fingerprints on vellum. It wouldn't convict anybody in the court of law. You need more than that. So he did a limited job there, and we didn't depend too much on that evidence. The press liked it, of course, because it was cops and robbers stuff. I would not now probably say much about it at all, because on reflection I think we don't have an adequate reference bank of Leonardo fingerprints [...]. My sense is – and this is Pascal's [Cotte] sense, too – that it's probably premature, given what we know about Leonardo's fingerprints, to come up with matches at all.⁷¹

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have to say that there is no real evidence that *La Bella Principessa* shows Bianca Giovanna Sforza, or that the vellum leaf comes from the Warsaw *Sforziad*. There are no secure portraits of Bianca known. In fact, another portrait in Biblioteca Ambrosiana is her probable likeness, together with the companion portrait of her husband, Galeazzo di Sanseverino. The profile of *La Bella Principessa* also differs from portraits of Bianca Maria Sforza and Beatrice d'Este, while there are no known likenesses of Anna Sforza to compare it to. Incidentally, there was confusion among scholars as to the two Biancas. Bianca Giovanna Sforza was advanced by Kemp, but Bianca Maria Sforza was proposed by Vezzosi and endorsed by Turner.

The vellum of the Warsaw *Sforziad* is of different quality/texture (white and smooth) than the support of *La Bella Principessa* (yellow and rough, with follicles) and its size is different too (by 0.8 cm). The drawing was also made on the inferior, hair-side of the vellum, unlike Birago's illuminations, which were on the superior side. Moreover, the style of *La Bella Principessa* drawing, without borders and truncated at the bottom, looks inconsistent in colouring and style with Birago's illuminations, as well as the overall style of the book. It was supposedly inserted in a place, where it would be facing a printed page, which is unlikely as the pigments (chalks) would transfer to it. The missing folio in the

Warsaw *Sforziad* was evidently left blank, as in the other copies of the codex in Paris and London. Moreover, there are only three stitching holes in the drawing, while there are at least five holes in all the extant copies of the *Sforziad*. Besides, the most probable iconographic reading of Birago's illumination proposed by Horodyski disproves the Sanseverino ownership, and points to Gian Galeazzo and one of his offspring (possibly Bona Sforza).

The 'archaic', formal and highly finished style of *La Bella Principessa* combined with the complex mixed media technique are unusual for Leonardo, and there is no evidence that he ever drew a full female profile (face and body), especially in coloured chalks on vellum. Moreover, the portrait does not fit into any category of drawings known to Leonardo. The often quoted reference to Jean Perréal mentioned coloured chalks on paper/cardboard, not on vellum as suggested, and the more probable date of his contacts with Leonardo in 1499, is too late for the style of the drawing.

Importantly, scholars favourable to the attribution clearly disagreed on the dating: Kemp suggested c. 1494–1496, while Vezzosi (and Turner) proposed the much earlier dating c. 1481–1482, which would exclude Bianca Giovanna as the sitter. The drawing was also unrecorded by Leonardo or the subsequent literature, and the twentieth-century provenance in the Marchig collection in Florence, where it was most likely seen by Berenson and Longhi, tends to disprove its authenticity. Crucially, the drawing displays flawed proportions of the human face, such as excessively long neck and too short nose as compared to the ear, while the mechanical and dry left-handed shading is on the outside of the contour of the face, unlike in all the other female profile portraits by Leonardo. Both the bust and face are in full profile, while in Leonardo's drawn female portraits only the face is in profile, while the bust is usually shown in three quarters. We have to accept the possibility that *La Bella Principessa* could be a skilful compilation of various portraits by Leonardo (two in the Louvre, one in Windsor) and other artists (de Predis), as well as a sculpted bust by Gian Cristoforo Romano, also in the Louvre.

- ¹ According to C. Geddo ('A "Pastel" by Leonardo da Vinci: His Newly Discovered Portrait of a Young Woman in Profile', *Artes*, 2008–2009, pp. 67–87), there are also glazes of watercolour in the garments of *La Bella Principessa*.
- ² *Ibid.* and also C. C. Bambach, 'Leonardo's Notes on Pastel Drawing', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, vol. 52, 2008, no. 2/3 (*Le tecniche del disegno rinascimentale: dai materiali allo stile. Atti del convegno internazionale, Firenze, 22–23 settembre 2008*, ed. by M. Faietti, L. Melli, A. Nova), pp. 177–204; M. Gregori, 'A Note on Leonardo', *Paragone*, LXI, 2009, no. 723, pp. 3–4; D. Ekserdjian, 'Leonardo da Vinci: "La Bella Principessa" – The Profile Portrait of a Milanese Woman' (book review), *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 152, 2010, no. 1287, June (Attributions, copies, fakes), pp. 420–421; P. C. Marani, 'Deux nouveaux Léonard?', *Dossier de l'art*, 2012, no. 195, avril, pp. 58–63.
- ³ Some articles and statements can be found on the Lumiere Technology website (and on: <<http://www.lumiere-technology.com/discoveries2.html>>; accessed on 29 Apr. 2015), e.g.: P. Cotte and M. Kemp, 'La Bella Principessa' and the Warsaw Sforziad (text carelessly typed with many misprints), <www.lumiere-technology.com/news/Study_Bella_Principessa_and_Warsaw_Sforziad.pdf> (accessed on 31 Jan. 2014); N. Turner, *Statement by Nicholas Turner concerning the portrait on vellum by Leonardo*, <www.lumiere-technology.com/images/Download/Nicholas_Turner_Statement.pdf> (accessed on 31 Jan. 2014); A. Vezzosi, *Profilo Nuziale da Giovane Dama*, abstract of the monograph *Leonardo Infinito. La vita, l'opera completa, la modernità* by A. Vezzosi, intro by C. Pedretti, <www.lumiere-technology.com/images/Download/Profile_Pr_Vezzosi.pdf>; C. Pedretti, 'Abstract of the introduction by Professor Carlo Pedretti to the monograph *Leonardo Infinito. La vita, l'opera completa, la modernità* by A. Vezzosi', <www.lumiere-technology.com/images/Download/Abstract_Pr_Pedretti.pdf>; C. Geddo, 'Statement of Cristina Geddo 2/7/08' <www.lumiere-technology.com/images/Download/Statement_of_Dr_Cristina_Geddo.pdf>; D. R. E. Wright, *Ludovico il Moro, Duke of Milan, and the Sforziada by Giovanni Simonetta in Warsaw*, available online at: <<https://sites.google.com/site/labelaprincessa/com/home/leonardo-da-vinci/la-bella-principessa/sforziad-birago-simonetta/books-articles/provenance/provenance---ludovico-il-moro-and-sforziad>> (accessed on 31 Jan. 2014).
- ⁴ S. Hewitt, "'Life with a Leonardo" – buyer Peter Silverman talks to ATG', *Antiques Trade Gazette*, no. 1913, 31 Oct. 2009, p. 4 (in PDF: <<http://content.yudu.com/Library/A1hrhz/AntiquesTradeGazette/resources/4.htm>>), or online (*Antiques Trade Gazette*, 26 October 2009) <<http://www.antiquestradegazette.com/news/2009/oct/26/%E2%80%99%E2%80%93buyer-peter-silverman-talks-to-atg/>> (accessed on 31 Jan. 2014).
- ⁵ Turner dated the drawing differently to Kemp as well as identified the sitter as Bianca Maria Sforza, not Bianca Giovanna Sforza, in this endorsing Prof. Vezzosi's views.
- ⁶ Vezzosi differed from Kemp in his dating of the drawing and his identification of the sitter in the portrait as Bianca Maria.
- ⁷ Marani, 'Deux nouveaux Léonard?'.
- ⁸ Ekserdjian, 'Leonardo da Vinci: "La Bella Principessa"'.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 421.
- ¹⁰ Mentioned in Geddo, 'Statement', quoted in P. Silverman, *Leonardo's Lost Princess: One Man's Quest to Authenticate an Unknown Portrait by Leonardo Da Vinci*, New Jersey, 2012, p. 227.
- ¹¹ Cotte and Kemp, 'La Bella Principessa' and the Warsaw Sforziad (no pagination).
- ¹² On Marchig the artist, see *Giannino Marchig, 1897–1983: paintings and drawings*, exh. cat. London, 1988, *Giannino Marchig, 1897–1983*, exh. cat., Geneva, 1985; *Giannino Marchig: 1897–1983: dipinti, disegni, incisioni*, exh. cat. Florence, Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi, 12 March – 5 June 1994 (Italian ed.).
- ¹³ See <http://www.artericerca.com/pittori_italiani_ottocento/m/schede_m/Marchig%20Giannino%20biografia.htm> (accessed on 31 Jan. 2014), Marchig's biography by Walter Abrami; 'Provava una sorta di comunione intima con i maggiori rappresentanti dell'arte italiana, si sentiva eletto quando scopriva per primo, casualmente (come nel caso di un dipinto di Bellini!), le impronte digitali che i secoli avevano nascoste ad altri, non a lui: esse gli appartenevano e si appropriava mentalmente, intimamente, solennemente del miracoloso segno sulla tela che diventava una reliquia'.
- ¹⁴ Silverman, *Leonardo's Lost Princess*, p. 130.
- ¹⁵ *Giannino Marchig: paintings, drawings, engravings*, exh. cat. Florence, Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi, 12 March – 5 June 1994 (English ed.).
- ¹⁶ J. Cartwright (Mrs Henry Ady), *Beatrice d'Este, Duchess of Milan, 1475–1497. A Study of the Renaissance*, London, 1910, p. 45.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 303.
- ¹⁹ See: <<http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.1192.html>> (under 'Provenance'; accessed on 28 Feb. 2014).
- ²⁰ Statements on the Lumiere Technology website (see n. 3 above), and in Silverman, *Leonardo's Lost Princess*, p. 209.
- ²¹ Vezzosi, 'Profilo Nuziale da Giovane Dama'.
- ²² Silverman, *Leonardo's Lost Princess*, p. 209.
- ²³ Cartwright, *Beatrice d'Este, Duchess of Milan*, p. 304.
- ²⁴ M. Vogt-Lüerssen, 'Identificare Caterina Sforza nei dipinti del Rinascimento attraverso il simbolismo', in *Caterina Sforza – 500° anniversario della morte (28 Maggio 1509). Atti del Convegno di studi e della Tavola rotonda internazionale, Forlì, 16 maggio 2009*, ed. by S. Arfelli, G. Giorgetti, Forlì, 2009, pp. 77–85 (for English version, see: <http://www.kleio.org/de/buecher/caterina_symbols/cs_en.html>; accessed on 31 Jan. 2014); *eadem*, *Die Sforza III: Isabella von Aragon und ihr Hofmaler Leonardo da Vinci*, Norderstedt, 2010; *eadem*, *Die Sforza II: Caterina Sforza – Tochter einer Krieger-Dynastie*, Norderstedt, 2008; *eadem*, *Die Sforza I: Bianca Maria Visconti – Die Stammutter der Sforza*, Norderstedt, 2008, and others. Her website: www.kleio.org. Private communication by e-mail.
- ²⁵ Perhaps a copy after Dürer's original.
- ²⁶ Wright, *Ludovico il Moro*.
- ²⁷ Cotte and Kemp, 'La Bella Principessa' and the Warsaw Sforziad.
- ²⁸ B. Horodyski, 'Miniaturzysta Sforzów', *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, 16, 1954, pp. 195–213.
- ²⁹ E. McGrath, 'Ludovico il Moro and His Moors', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 65, 2002, pp. 67–94.
- ³⁰ Wright, *Ludovico il Moro*.

- 31 Horodyski, 'Miniaturzysta Sforzów', p. 195.
- 32 'Pierwsze sześć kart zajmują przedmowy i list dedykacyjny tłumacza skierowany do Ludwika Mora a właściwy tekst zaczyna się na pięknie zdobionej karcie 7, tu także znajduje się tytuł dzieła' (Horodyski, 'Miniaturzysta Sforzów', p. 195).
- 33 Horodyski, 'Miniaturzysta Sforzów', p. 202. In 1493 or 1494, their daughter Bona Sforza was born, the future Queen of Poland, who probably brought the copy of the *Sforziad* with her.
- 34 Wright, *Ludovico il Moro*.
- 35 McGrath, 'Ludovico il Moro and His Moors', pp. 80–82.
- 36 Cotte and Kemp, '*La Bella Principessa*' and the Warsaw *Sforziad*'.
- 37 Horodyski, 'Miniaturzysta Sforzów', p. 205: 'dwa stylizowane jakby kute z brązu delfiny, u języków, których wiszą trzy splecione pierścienie. Emblemat ten był również używany przez Francesco Sforzę'.
- 38 Translated from Polish, see Horodyski, 'Miniaturzysta Sforzów', pp. 207–208: 'Był on niezawodnie przeznaczony dla potomka Gian Galeazza i Izabelli Aragońskiej. Wskazuje na to herb utworzony z połówek herbów Mediolanu i Aragonii'. 'Uderza przede wszystkim, że łódź w dolnym herbie prawego marginesu ma tylko jednego pasażera. [...] Brak postaci Gian Galeazzo [...]. W momencie powstawania miniatury Galeazzo już nie żył. Potwierdzeniem tego może być złamana tarcza z monogramem księcia, a także ten sam monogram jakby niknący na tle czarnej otchłani u góry dekoracji lewego marginesu. W takim razie zrozumiały się także staje deszcz łez spływających do zawiązki [...]. W tym oświeceniu nabiera także wymowy fakt, że Murzynek w miniaturze siedzi na sarkofagu. [...] Wszystkie te elementy pozwalają przypuszczać, że iluminacja powstała już po śmierci Galeazza, a więc po dacie 21 października 1494. Co więcej, przypuszczać można, że występująca w miniaturze jako para małżeńska Galeazzo Sanseverino i Bianca Giovanna byli już w tym czasie istotnie małżeństwem, nie narzeczonymi'.
- 39 I would like to thank the staff of the National Library (Biblioteka Narodowa) in Warsaw for kindly allowing me to view the precious codex in the summer of 2012, and for their assistance (especially Ewa Potrzebicka and Jolanta Sokołowska, Zakład Starych Druków, Biblioteka Narodowa).
- 40 L. Syson with L. Keith, *Leonardo da Vinci, Painter at the Court of Milan*, exh. cat. National Gallery, London, 2011.
- 41 Cotte and Kemp, '*La Bella Principessa*' and the Warsaw *Sforziad*'.
- 42 *Ibid.*
- 43 Silverman, *Leonardo's Lost Princess*, p. 207 (*Statement by Nicholas Turner*).
- 44 Geddo, 'Statement', in Silverman, *Leonardo's Lost Princess*, p. 220.
- 45 *Ibid.*
- 46 Cotte and Kemp, '*La Bella Principessa*' and the Warsaw *Sforziad*'.
- 47 Geddo, 'Statement', in Silverman, *Leonardo's Lost Princess*, p. 220.
- 48 Cotte and Kemp, '*La Bella Principessa*' and the Warsaw *Sforziad*'.
- 49 *Ibid.*
- 50 M. Kemp and P. Cotte, *The Story of the New Masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci: La Bella Principessa*, London, 2010, p. 31.
- 51 Silverman, *Leonardo's Lost Princess*, p. 189.
- 52 *Ibid.*, pp. 191–192.
- 53 M. Kemp, *Leonardo* (rev. ed.), Oxford, 2004, p. 210.
- 54 Kemp and Cotte, *The Story*, p. 14.
- 55 Bambach, 'Leonardo's Notes on Pastel Drawing', p. 180.
- 56 'le pastel est d'invention française, c'est du moins, ce que l'on peut inférer du témoignage de Leonard de Vinci qui a appris de Jean Perréal, venu à Milan en 1499, à la suite du roi Louis XII, le mode de colorier à sec', P. Lavallée, *Les techniques du dessin. Leur évolution dans les différentes écoles de l'Europe*, Paris, 1949.
- 57 Kemp and Cotte, *The Story*, p. 192, note 11.
- 58 *Dizionario delle origini, invenzioni e scoperte nelle arti, nelle scienze...*, Milan, 1831, p. 847.
- 59 Kemp and Cotte, *The Story*, p. 83.
- 60 B. Berenson, *The Drawings of the Florentine Painters*, vol. III, Chicago, 1938, p. 168.
- 61 *Leonardo da Vinci, Master Draftsman*, ed. by C. C. Bambach, exh. cat. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2003, p. 453.
- 62 Cartwright, *Beatrice d'Este, Duchess of Milan*, p. 209.
- 63 M. Kemp, *Leonardo Da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man*, Oxford, 2007, p. 174.
- 64 Kemp and Cotte, *The Story*, p. 70.
- 65 Pedretti, 'Abstract of the introduction'.
- 66 Z. Żygulski Jr, 'Ze studiów nad Damą z gronostajem. Styl ubioru i węzły Leonarda', in *Światła Stambułu*, Warsaw, 1999 (first published in *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki*, vol. 31, 1969, no. 1, pp. 3–40).
- 67 *Ibid.*, pp. 155–156.
- 68 Turner, 'Statement' (online) and Silverman, *Leonardo's Lost Princess*, pp. 207–208 (*Statement by Nicholas Turner*).
- 69 *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 70 *Ibid.*
- 71 A. M. Goldstein, 'The Da Vinci Detective: Art Historian Martin Kemp on Rediscovering Leonardo's Tragic Portrait of a Renaissance Princess' (interview with Martin Kemp), 17 October 2011, *Artinfo* (now Blouin Artinfo), available online at: <<http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/749292/the-da-vinci-detective-art-historian-martin-kemp-on>> (accessed on 31 Jan. 2014).

