for the first seven years of her marriage, Lucrezia Borgia conducted her financial affairs in the manner of a typical northern Italian duchess preoccupied with outfitting her household, decorating her suite, and granting alms to convents (Figure 1). In 1509, however, she undertook what appears to be the first of two large architectural projects completed over a period of ten years. The first was the construction of the convent of San Bernardino in Ferrara. When she purchased what had been the convent of San Bernardo from the friars of San Bartolo in a contract of November 1509, the church, courtyard, a cloister, and a refectory were already in place on the via Gioveccia. Between September and November of that year, she added gates, pilasters, and a wall surrounding the vast gardens (Figure 2).

War delayed further work for several years, but by at least 1515 the duchess was funding construction for a second project on the large plot of land on the northern flank of via Gioveccia. By this time, the tenor of her finances and economic administration had undergone a remarkable change, and a complex under construction adjacent to San Bernardino appeared destined to accommodate her massively enlarged economic activities and to become the headquarters of her entrepreneurial reclamation enterprises in the duchy of Ferrara. Described as a palazzo in her financial records, it included the anomalous structures on the via Gioveccia illustrated in Andrea Bolzoni’s eighteenth-century maps, sandwiched between the two convents of San Bernardino and San Silvestro, and the central part of San Silvestro itself (Figure 3).

Surprisingly enough, all recollection of her construction of this structure vanished within just a few years, and despite generations of scholars poring over her remaining records in the state archives in Modena and producing numerous biographies of Lucrezia and of the Este family generally, no trace of either the palazzo or her entrepreneurial activities emerged. Lucrezia has been locked into
Figure 2 Convent of San Bernardino, Ferrara, after Benedetto Campana, plan
the paradigm of an Italian Renaissance duchess, and a minor one at that, known for her material possessions and family affiliations. She has not been viewed as a great patron—she commissioned only a few literary works, including Pietro Bembo’s Gli Asolani and a variety of religious and spiritual tracts; she was not a collector of antiquities; no works of art commissioned by her survive; relatively few of her letters are extant; and she did not thrust herself into prominence in political matters. Historians compare her unfavorably to her brilliant sister-in-law Isabella d’Este, marchioness of Mantua, famed in all these realms and the author of some four thousand letters. In those arenas in which patricians are celebrated— patronage and politics—Isabella excelled, while Lucrezia has been of interest mainly for her jewelry, her wedding to Alfonso I d’Este and fabulous dowry, and her notorious relatives, her father, Pope Alexander VI, and her brother, Cesare Borgia, il Valentino. Her unexpected entrepreneurial activities during the last six years of her life have escaped historians’ attention, as has the suburban palace she erected as headquarters for her ambitious program. Indeed, the convent she subsidized (San Bernardino) and the one fashioned from her palace (San Silvestro) themselves disappeared, as did most of Ferrara’s convents, following the French invasion in 1796 and the alienation of ecclesiastical property in the nineteenth century.

I argue here that despite the abundant evidence in her financial and other records, Lucrezia’s economic enterprises were overlooked precisely because they did not fit within the paradigm of a Renaissance patrician woman. Instead, her palazzo and her reclamation set her apart as a fledgling capitalist before the contours of such a figure had yet been filled in for either men or women. For example, her husband was granting long-term leases of huge tracts of his duchy at negligible, in-kind rents, and he was spending his own capital on the construction of Belvedere, a spectacular leisure retreat on an island in the Po just southwest of Ferrara. Lucrezia, with a more shrewd attitude, began spending her capital, including her jewelry, for her reclamation projects. Unfortunately, the disregard for her activities, however unusual, led to the dispersal, destruction, or loss of most of the records that would testify to them. As a female patrician Lucrezia could act in ways unavailable to other women, such as governing the city during her husband’s absences, but as an economic actor developing, financing, and directing a huge reclamation campaign in the duchy’s marshlands, she positioned herself as a capitalist

Figure 3 Andrea Bolzoni, Alzato di Ferrara, 1782, detail
entrepreneur, behaving in ways foreign to other women of her time and ignored by subsequent historians. In her seminal article of 1977, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?,” Joan Kelly primarily addressed women’s status and economic life. Although she questioned the poverty of research in this arena, subsequent researchers, as Samuel K. Cohn recently noted, have largely ignored the questions she raised. To the degree that scholars have studied the topic of women and economics, they have concentrated on middle-class women, domestic labor, and marginal work such as prostitution. I am currently completing a larger study of Lucrezia’s patrimony in which her enormous reclamation project, pursued with dedication over a period of six years until she died from complications of childbirth, can now be seen as an early program for the capitalist development of submarginal swampland.

Because historians have largely ignored women as economic actors, Lucrezia’s achievements are all the more striking. The Este were justly famous at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century for erecting or remodeling spectacular and innovative palaces, from Palazzo Schifanoia, Palazzo dei Diamanti, Belfiore, and Belvedere in Ferrara to the Belriguardo estate in nearby Voghena. Magnificent, even opulent buildings testified to the status and magnificence of Duke Ercole I d’Este and his son Alfonso I d’Este. Such palaces hold great appeal for historians because of their designs, their architecture, and the lifestyle they accommodated. Whatever their merits, however, such building enterprises depleted rather than created wealth. In her much smaller building program, Lucrezia shunned magnificence in favor of the far more pragmatic goal of establishing a center for her entrepreneurial, commercial, and reclamation initiatives. She launched an aggressive six-year campaign between 1513 and 1519 to reclaim and transform between twenty-five and thirty thousand acres into productive farmland. By comparison, Venice did not undertake a reclamation program of comparable size until 1545, and Lucrezia’s grandson Alfonso II joined a consortium to drain twenty-five thousand acres beginning in 1564. After her death in 1519, Alfonso turned most of the palace that had been the functional center of her activities over to the nuns of San Silvestro for their convent. Both San Silvestro and San Bernardino were demolished during the nineteenth century. This article reconstructs the history and use of the palace based on the relatively few remaining records.

To arrive at a hypothesis for the palace’s plan is a bit like peeling an onion, starting with separating the Palazzo Borgia from the convent of San Bernardino, and then examining what can be determined about the convent of San Silvestro based on a plan and cursory description made in 1809, when plans were made to demolish the entire complex. From there I work back through the various transformations and enlargements sustained by the nuns since they acquired the palace in 1520. My hypotheses about the original plan and purpose of the palace are based in part on a process of reasoning backward from later transformations, and in part on assessing Lucrezia’s records for information about how the palace was used during her lifetime.

Lucrezia Borgia, Duchess of Ferrara

Born on 18 April 1480 to the Spanish cardinal and future Pope Alexander VI, Rodrigo Borgia, and a Roman matron, Vannozza Cattanei, Lucrezia Borgia entered a world in which women enjoyed few legal rights but significant obligations as wives, daughters, and mothers. That her father and Vannozza were not married would ordinarily have constituted a blemish on her honor, but once he was elevated to the papacy in 1492, his new status trumped the stain of illegitimacy. Much loved by her father, Lucrezia nonetheless figured primarily as many patrician daughters did, that is, as useful devices for securing political and social alliances through marriage to scions of noble families. At the age of thirteen, she was betrothed to Giovanni Sforza, lord of Pesaro and relative of the powerful Ludovico (il Moro) Sforza, duke of Milan. In the turbulent times of late quattrocento Italy, this particular alliance proved less useful once Rodrigo became Pope Alexander VI, and so in 1497 he instituted proceedings to annul the marriage on the grounds that Sforza was impotent and unable to consummate it. Apparently disturbed by this turn of events, Lucrezia retired to the convent of Santo Sisto on the Appian Way in Rome, where a papal servant acted as a conduit for information, gifts, and news between the young woman and her father. The two adolescents apparently entered into a sexual liaison, resulting in Lucrezia’s pregnancy and the unfortunate servant’s arrest and subsequent death, his body washing up on the banks of the Tiber just days later.

No official information about any of this appeared in papal records or letters, so only the reports of ambassadors to Italian courts throughout Italy recorded the events. One reported that an enraged Cesare slaughtered the unfortunate servant in the presence of Alexander VI, his blood splattering the papal regalia, and another noted the discovery of his lifeless body on the riverbank. Others related how Lucrezia appeared as a witness in her annulment case swollen with pregnancy even while she insisted that she had not had relations with Giovanni Sforza.

Having shifted alliance from the Sforza to the Aragona
of Naples, the Pope first organized the marriage of his youngest son Joffre to Sanxia d’Aragona, illegitimate daughter of the king of Naples, and then the marriage of Lucrezia with Sanxia’s brother, Alfonso. By all accounts this marriage turned out to be a love match, and after at least one miscarriage Lucrezia gave birth to Rodrigo in 1500. Two marriages with the Borgia clan apparently exhausted the willingness of the king of Naples to accommodate the Pope; he balked at accepting Cesare as a suitor for his daughter Carlotta. The Borgia’s shifted their alliance elsewhere, leaving the outspoken Alfonso d’Aragona to become a liability and an inconvenient husband for Lucrezia. In July and August 1500, Cesare’s henchmen launched two attempts on Alfonso’s life, the first leaving him grievously injured but alive, to be nursed with desperate attentiveness by Lucrezia and Sanxia until the second, successful attempt. Bereft and desperate, Lucrezia quickly abandoned Rome for her estate at Nepi, where she mourned the death of her much-loved spouse. After initially refusing even to consider another marriage because of the unpleasant fates of both of her partners, Lucrezia finally consented in mid-1501 to the proposal advanced by Alexander VI that she marry the heir to the Este duchy in Ferrara. Armed with a rich dowry of some three hundred thousand gold ducats (roughly comparable to between thirty and forty million dollars today), Lucrezia arrived in Ferrara in February 1502, becoming duchess after the death of her father-in-law, Ercole I d’Este, in January 1505. After at least fifteen pregnancies, ten of which ended in the birth of a child, she died of the complications of childbirth on 24 June 1519.15

Like the reputations of other women of the Italian Renaissance, Lucrezia’s began to suffer assaults: allegations of sexual misconduct damaged the family’s honor, not just that of their female target, so it was hardly uncommon for enemies to make such assertions.16 An outraged and disdained Giovanni Sforza hurled the first charges of incest against Alexander VI following the public annulment of his marriage to Lucrezia on the grounds that he was impotent—an allegation that cut right to his status and worth as a man. Enemies of the Borjas elaborated on this initial claim over the next decades, even though Giovanni apparently later recanted. Victor Hugo and Gaetano Donizetti, in the nineteenth century, and twentieth-century filmmakers and authors embellished the charges even further with claims that Lucrezia poisoned her spouse and committed other atrocities.17 None of her contemporaries, even those with no particular fondness for the Borjas, advanced such stories in their private correspondence with rulers elsewhere in Italy; on the contrary, they testify to her frantic efforts to save Alfonso and her desperation following his death. Biog-raphers since the nineteenth century have disputed the claims of poisoning with extensive documentation which need not be covered here.18 Perhaps the most powerful evidence that such charges either were not taken seriously or did not circulate at the time is the fact that Ercole I d’Este, who had planned to marry off his son to a French princess, accepted Lucrezia as his daughter-in-law, albeit reluctantly. Had there been substance to the rumors, Ercole would certainly have refused to permit such a damaged woman to become the mother of his heirs. She lived up to the highest expectations during her years in Ferrara, and was widely admired and recognized for her piety and her successful support of her husband and the duchy during years of terrible war against Venice and Pope Julius II.19

The city in which Lucrezia arrived upon her marriage in 1502 had been undergoing a spectacular transformation since 1492, when Ercole initiated a project to increase Ferrara’s size by more than twofold and embellish it with new palaces, new convents, and long, wide, and straight streets (Figure 4).20 In addition to purchasing or trading for property on which he erected palaces in what came to be known as the Herculean Addition, Ercole encouraged patricians to construct their own family palaces in the new part of the city. Nonetheless, even after a decade of feverish building, cottages and rural casali spread out among the fields throughout most of the newly enclosed northern half of the city. Lucrezia situated her palace adjacent to San Bernardino in a largely rural area to the far east of the city center, directly on the via Gioveva, a new street traced along the border where the old city walls had been located.

Lucrezia’s Building Program

The principal documents that help sort out the history of the three buildings on this site include a sales contract of 1509 between Lucrezia and the monks of San Bartolo; a contract of 1521 whereby Alfonso I sold part of Lucrezia’s palace to the nuns of San Silvestro; and a plan and brief description of the contract produced by Luigi Casoni in 1809 in preparation for the sale and demolition of the entire complex (Figure 5).21 Additional documentation includes various convent accounts of construction activities between 1520 and 1798, notary records of payments, ducal records for building activities, and Lucrezia Borgia’s own account books at the Archivio di Stato, Modena. Other than systematically describing it as a palazzo, none of the documented expenditures for this site indicates the building’s purpose, probably for the simple reason that a palazzo needed no explanation.22 Court records for additions to the convent of San Bernardino, such as openings in the garden
wall, new doors, and additional minor repairs, always carefully describe the expenses as specifically for the convent of San Bernardino. Before the convent was named, ledgers refer somewhat clumsily to the complex as “the convent building for nuns that the Duchess is having built on the land where the church of the friars of San Bartolo was started.” Later records describe work being done for “the nuns of San Bernardino.” In Lucrezia’s own account books, charitable contributions or other matters relating to the city’s convents always specify the nuns of the relevant convent. But the ambitious construction scheme initiated in August 1515 on the land adjacent to the convent of San Bernardino never included mention of a convent or nuns. In 1520, an accounting prepared more than a year after her death, describes the project as follows: “Our late illustrious Duchess, on account of the expenditures for her ladyship’s building by San Bernardino must give on the above date lire marchesane 1332 and 16 soldi which Maestro Lorenzo da Caravaggio, mason, advanced for the costs of having set 950,055 new and old bricks in a palace on via della Giovecca adjacent to the nuns of San Bernardino.” Although it is regularly recorded in the ledgers as the palace by San Bernardino, for clarity and simplicity I shall refer to this building as the Palazzo Borgia. The reference to a palazzo helps make sense of the unusual configuration of the convent of San Silvestro adjacent to San Bernardino, as well as the anomalous structures situated between the two convents on the via Giovecca visible in the alzati (eighteenth-century maps) of Ferrara produced by Andrea Bolzoni. The San Silvestro convent has a high wall on the street front, followed by an open court before the building proper, and a scoperto, or interior courtyard without a loggia. The adjacent structure to the west aligned directly on the street has twin chimneys on the front elevation, fenestration on both the ground and first floors, and a broad entrance portal. Built of brick produced in Lucrezia’s own fornaci, or brickworks, the surface would have been covered with a heavy stucco veneer, usually accompanied by painted friezes and other decorations. The nude brick façades of Ferrara’s buildings today would have horrified Lucrezia’s contemporaries. As I discuss in greater detail below, this complex displays few features characteristic of Ferrara’s early-sixteenth-century convents, but many of those of a private aristocratic palace of late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Ferrara.

The task of documenting the Palazzo Borgia and distinguishing it from the two convents is not easy. Archaeological digs are not possible: the entire complex disappeared in the decades following the arrival of French troops in 1796, and nearly the entire block is now covered by the city’s primary hospital, Sant’Anna. The only existing plans of the buildings date from the early nineteenth century—more than three centuries after their construction—and the only images are eighteenth-century city views produced by Andrea Bolzoni, his successors, and Antonio Sandri, all of
Figure 5 Luigi Casoni, convent of San Silvestro, 1809, plan
whom were denied entry to the cloisters and hence produced depictions that do not correspond in fundamental ways to the nineteenth-century plans (Figures 6a, b).  
Finally, two years after Lucrezia’s death in 1519, her husband in part sold and in part donated most of the buildings and land to the nuns of San Silvestro for their new convent, the contract mentioning without detailing the buildings already on the site.  
Within a short time, the nuns went about completing the convent, adding the church, a dormitory, and other structures, but again only a very general account book remains for this work and it fails to specify the additions. Distinguishing the palace and the convents depends therefore on scattered documents, deductions based on comparisons with other early-sixteenth-century convents and palaces, and links to Lucrezia Borgia’s other involvements during the last decade of her life. I begin with a brief history of the two convents in the early sixteenth century, continue by discussing the nineteenth-century plans and relevant sixteenth-century documents necessary to produce a proposed configuration of the palace as erected by Lucrezia Borgia, and conclude by speculating on the purposes for which the palace may have been erected.

San Bernardino

As part of his campaign to populate the vast lands annexed to the city by the new walls constructed for the Addizione Herculea, Duke Ercole I d’Este proposed to the Cistercian monks of the Abbazia di San Bartolo that they abandon their monastery outside the walls and erect a new one on land he donated on the eastern edge of Ferrara on the via Giovanna, close to the new walls. The monks reluctantly initiated construction, although hardly with the alacrity that Ercole seemed to want. Not surprisingly, they adopted the tactics common to powerless groups everywhere when confronted with unpalatable decisions by regnant powers: they dragged their feet. By the time Ercole died in January 1505, the cloister, dormitory, vaulted chapter house, and a variety of other rooms were complete, and probably the church as well. There is no evidence of further construction by the monks, nor did they ever transfer their community to the new monastery. Instead, they sold the entire complex and its large garden to Lucrezia, including the land on which subsequently her palace and later the convent of San Silvestro would sit.

In the meantime, Lucrezia’s niece Camilla Borgia, the illegitimate five- or six-year-old daughter of Cesare Borgia, arrived in Ferrara with no hopes other than throwing herself on the mercy of her aunt. With her grandfather, Pope Alexander VI, and her father, Cesare, both dead by 1507, Camilla’s only future lay in taking religious vows and joining a convent. There is evidence that Lucrezia took charge of Camilla as early as late 1506, because in January 1507 her accounts record a payment to Tadia Bendedio to make outfits for a child who may well have been Camilla in the Corpus Domini convent. Having seen to Camilla’s legitimacy in August 1509, in September Lucrezia began the necessary construction work to transform the still empty buildings of San Bartolo into a female monastery where her niece later took her vows as Sister Lucrezia. On 15 February 1510, accompanied by Lucrezia and other Ferrarese noblewomen, the nuns walked in solemn procession the few blocks from Corpus Domini to San Bernardino. Lucrezia’s close involvement with San Bernardino continued through the rest of her life. In 1516, she received papal permission to introduce reforms in the convent, specifically, greater adherence to the
rule of poverty; she frequently withdrew from court life to the convent for periods of prayer and retreat, particularly in times of mourning or when her health flagged.  

The absence of Lucrezia’s account books for the years between 1509 and 1517, as well as a gap in the ducal chamber’s records from the same period, make it impossible to know whether either party paid for additional work at San Bernardino, but since the first cloister alone had been erected prior to the sale, the nuns probably saw to the construction of the second courtyard some time after the sisters took possession of the convent on 15 February 1510.  

Convent financial records for this period also did not survive, but an arbitration document of 1519 suggests that the sisters did indeed continue construction work over the course of the decade, and most likely for several decades until their complex was complete.

San Silvestro

The property Lucrezia purchased from the monks of San Bartolo cost a hefty four thousand ducats; the 1521 sales contract to San Silvestro by which Alfonso sold part of the property to the nuns of San Silvestro notes that the duchess had been permitted to retain the land adjacent to the convent for her own purposes, to do with as she pleased. In August 1515, she began construction of the Palazzo Borgia.  

But the complications of war had already led to a different destination for part of the property. In his campaign to enlarge and strengthen the city’s fortifications against Venice and Pope Julius II during the war years, Alfonso I demolished most of the original thirteenth-century convent of San Silvestro just outside the southeastern city walls. In 1516, Pope Leo X approved the division of San Bernardino’s abundant land to provide for “building a pious site for a congregation of pious women living honestly.” Plans to transfer San Silvestro were already under way in 1515, and probably even earlier, since the Franciscan provincial chapter approved a project in July 1515. In his account of Ferrara’s churches and convents one hundred years later, Marc’Antonio Guarini noted that the nuns received the land and buildings in April 1520, leaving ample time for Lucrezia to have concluded construction after receiving papal approval in 1516.  

At a chapter meeting, the nuns reluctantly agreed to accept Alfonso’s proposal, which included purchase of the property, and the document recording the property transfer in 1521 notes that the nuns were receiving part of both the land and the buildings, structures Alfonso assured them were of greater value than their former convent. The sales contract in diocesan archives reveals that the transfer actually took place in February 1521.  

Although the nuns of San Silvestro acquired the convent and grounds, including much of the Palazzo Borgia, in February 1521, construction of the necessary additions to the existing buildings had begun in 1520. Few references to specific building activities appear in the remaining register, but conspicuous sums were spent in the category of fabbrica (building), especially between 1520 and 1527.  

The ledger helps little in sorting out expenses on the monastic complex, since buildings included all construction and repairs on any property owned by the convent. Nonetheless, a couple of entries indicate that the church, although mostly complete by 1525 (and indeed, consecrated on 14 September 1524), did not have proper pavement until 1534, and that construction of a dormitory started after 1526. Huge lacunae in the convent’s records severely limit an understanding of subsequent construction, but two histories drafted by nuns from 1662 and after 1798 document some additional construction work in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

At least part of the complex remained in the hands of the Este family throughout the sixteenth century, always with a secular designation. In 1524, Alfonso I paid to have the fienile (hay barn) and the street in front of it paved, and the records make a clear distinction between expenses for the palace and those related to the nuns of San Bernardino. The property inventory of Lucrezia’s grandson, Alfonso II d’Este, the last duke of Ferrara, nearly eighty years later, described this group of buildings as including stables, carriage room, two apartments, and another house near the stables, which seems then to have been handed off to Cornelio Bentivoglio. The report includes the note that “C[onte] del Cornelio” claimed Alfonso had promised to grant certain of these rooms to him in feudo, an already old-fashioned term meaning that Bentivoglio would owe feudal duties to Alfonso. Descendants of the deposed rulers of Bologna and Ercole I’s illegitimate daughter Lucrezia, Ercole II’s illegitimate son Cornelio Bentivoglio, or his heirs evidently ceded to the nuns’ pressures in 1618 to relinquish ownership of this large wing of the building, most certainly the nucleus of the original Palazzo Borgia. In 1618, after considerable negotiations, the nuns took over the rooms formerly used by the Bentivoglio family and integrated them with the rest of the convent, including remodeling part of the building for a new refectory. Since the 1809 plan identifies the refectory as the large ground-floor room on the south wing of the convent, facing the via Giovecca, this was clearly the part of the palace and the adjacent custodian’s quarters that remained in Este hands until 1618. The next year, abbess Elena Calcagnini erected a new dormitory, probably the northeast wing with its loggia.

In the early seventeenth century, the nuns spent con-
The Palazzo Borgia
Throughout the years of construction, even as late as August 1520, more than a year after her death, Lucrezia’s account books and other notarial records refer to the structure under construction as a palace, not a monastery, and in December 1519 the nuns of San Silvestro still lived in what remained of their old convent. The most probable explanation for the confusion in the records is that Lucrezia was indeed erecting a palace for her own purposes along the eastern flank of San Bernardino, leaving the remainder of the ample property for the replacement convent. Since Alfonso had elected to demolish part of the original convent, construction of the new one would have devolved to the ducal chamber, not the duchess. The scanty visual evidence from Aleotti’s plans of 1605 and 1611 and from Bolzoni’s plan of over two hundred years later tends to confirm a separate, secular complex, despite the absence of more precise explanations for the building campaign (Figures 7, 8; see Figure 3).

Evidence for the state of the complex at Lucrezia Borgia’s death is extremely limited. Nonetheless, I propose both a plan and a purpose for the Palazzo Borgia. Even a cursory review of the nineteenth-century plans and Bolzoni’s maps reveals that the plan and organization of San Silvestro were

The convent's own detailed account books for 1736 are missing, but a summary registry covering the years 1733-38 indicates that at least one building in the complex had to be entirely reconstructed. Another history produced by the nuns, dating from 1798, describes the fire as having swept through the entire second story of one wing, and identifies as the dormitory a structure in danger of collapse from the effects of the fire. The account also notes that the interior church reserved for the cloistered nuns and the bell-tower, both located near the northeast wing and its loggia, were threatened by the flames. The dormitory wing of 1618 would then appear to be the one that required reconstruction, and not the second floors of the original Palazzo Borgia, which also contained cells for the nuns.

ciderable sums of money adding to the complex and beautifying the garden with marble columns, benches, and other decorations, although no traces of these embellishments survived in the 1809 inventory. Like other convents in Ferrara, San Silvestro suffered from both the effects of a major earthquake in 1570 and a devastating fire that later transformed the original complex even further. In June 1736, part of the convent burned in a fire accidentally ignited by a nun working near the chicken coop, but none of the contemporary reports explains which sections were damaged or destroyed. The convent's own detailed account books for 1736 are missing, but a summary registry covering the years 1733-38 indicates that at least one building in the complex had to be entirely reconstructed. Another history produced by the nuns, dating from 1798, describes the fire as having swept through the entire second story of one wing, and identifies as the dormitory a structure in danger of collapse from the effects of the fire. The account also notes that the interior church reserved for the cloistered nuns and the bell-tower, both located near the northeast wing and its loggia, were threatened by the flames. The dormitory wing of 1618 would then appear to be the one that required reconstruction, and not the second floors of the original Palazzo Borgia, which also contained cells for the nuns.
anomalous, quite unlike other convents erected *ex novo* in Ferrara between the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. The church was set back from the street behind an enclosed and gated courtyard. It stood adjacent to the convent, with its interior court framed by two-story structures on three sides in the Bolzoni version, and four in the nineteenth-century plan. From this square courtyard without a loggia, or cloister, two additions extended to the north in parallel wings. Comparison with neighboring San Bernardino is instructive, for here the building mass frames two large courtyards: the entire complex is inward-looking, insular. The same is true of the plans of the somewhat earlier convents of Santa Caterina da Siena (1501), Santa Maria delle Grazie detto di Mortara (ca. 1502), and the nearly contemporary Santa Monica (1515), all of which have one or more arcaded cloisters defining their cores (Figure 9).59 Only where a convent was assembled from existing buildings, or where additions were made over decades or centuries, as at Corpus Domini, do irregular plans similar to that of San Silvestro emerge, but even Corpus Domini and Sant’Antonio in Polesine had more than one cloister.60 The unusual disposition of buildings can readily be explained if San Silvestro, too, was at least partly fashioned from existing buildings, in this case, a portion of the palace complex Lucrezia had constructed.

The 1809 plan provides the most compelling evidence that the main block of the convent started life as a palace in the early sixteenth century. As represented in this plan and in the eighteenth-century map by Bolzoni, the via Giovecca elevation consisted of a wall, followed by a long, narrow courtyard parallel to the street before arriving at the building proper (see Figures 3, 5). Such treatment of an entrance was not uncommon in early-sixteenth-century Ferrara; Biagio Rossetti’s house originally had a similar walled courtyard entrance sequence, and the convent of Santa Caterina da Siena also had a high wall and narrow open court separating the main building from the street (although Santa Caterina’s entrance opened onto not one but two cloisters with loggias). While not uncommon in either convents or private palaces in early-sixteenth-century Ferrara, the wall here dates from the last quarter of the century. It appears to have been erected at the direction of the Apostolic Visitor Giovanni Battista Maremonti after his stay in November 1574, evidently as a result of his concern that the convent’s windows were visible to outsiders.61 The report also clarifies that at this point the *parlatorio* (room for talking with visitors) was connected to the church and sacristy.

Most telling is the plan of the main block itself, which mirrors the aristocratic urban palace taking on typological form in late-fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Ferrara.
Figure 9  Giovanni Tosi, Santa Caterina da Siena, plan
From the time of Biagio Rossetti forward, palaces developed with either a U-shaped or an L-shaped court, or as a straight line facing the street. The Palazzo Borgia follows the U-type, with square interior courtyard framed by two-story blocks on at least three sides, and a wall and gate on the fourth leading to a rear garden or, less commonly, another building block (Figure 10). Stables, barns, and the like were located in a wing beyond the main building complex. Likewise, the vaulted, double-ramp staircase in the right-hand corner of the structure, with a smaller service staircase in the opposite corner, characterized other fifteenth- and sixteenth-century palaces in Ferrara and elsewhere. Although few such structures from the fifteenth century survive, one that loosely fits this footprint sits on the old via della Rosa, now via Armari. Several other palazzi erected in the Terra Nova after 1492 conformed in general to the same model, including the Palazzo Francesco da Castello, the ducal physician (now Prosperi-Sacriti), and Palazzo Turchi.

Palaces in Ferrara during this period typically had a large room on the piano nobile above the entrance; if there was such a room in the Palazzo Borgia, the nuns probably later divided it into several smaller ones. The entrance in turn usually consisted of a wide, centrally placed opening, or androne, leading into the courtyard, a feature also found in the Palazzo Borgia. Yet another feature that links the building to sixteenth-century palaces is the partial floor, or piano ammezzato, a service level usually located near the entrance and typical of seigniorial and bourgeois palaces in Ferrara. A 1799 description of the custodian’s house (on the left in the 1809 plan; see Figure 13) notes the presence of a pantry at the midpoint of the two-ramp staircase, which seems to have been a remnant of a piano ammezzato. Most of these disappeared when the palaces underwent remodeling.

Figure 10 illustrates what I believe to have been the sections of the complex Lucrezia erected as a palace before her death in 1519. It includes the central block, the custodian’s quarters, and the wing dedicated to the barn and stables. Figure 11 shows the sections that appear to have been occupied and added by the nuns between 1520 and 1535; the only wings with cells on the second floor were the west and north blocks, each with cells opening off a central hallway. The nuns probably remodeled the rooms on the second story between 1520 and the 1530s, when they also removed the gate and closed the courtyard with a new wing. Here they placed a kitchen and probably a pantry on the ground floor, and twenty-three cells in the second story on the north wing, to which would be added the thirty-seven
of earlier construction. After having acquired the sections occupied by the Bentivoglio, in 1618 they added the dormitory in the wing to the north of the church, which also has the only loggia in the entire complex (Figure 12). The section of palace reclaimed from the Bentivoglio would have included the section to the west of the *androne*, as well as the apartments, barn, stables, *fienile*, and other outbuildings. Either between 1520 and 1535 or, more likely, during work on the refectory in 1618, the nuns, I believe, also closed off what would have been the main entrance in the middle of the via Giovecca elevation, the *androne*, shifting it east to the custodian’s house. It remained there two hundred years later, conveniently adjacent to the new *parlatorio*, where visitors could speak with cloistered nuns through an iron grille. When the building was still the Palazzo Borgia, this unit probably housed members of her household staff.

Casoni’s 1809 accounting estimates that the entire complex contained over 1.5 million bricks, while Lucrezia’s account books for 1519 document 950,055 bricks (Figure 13). These numbers accommodate the notion of an additional building on the fourth side of the court, half of the church as well as the dormitory wing to the north. By comparison, the convent of Santa Caterina required 519,350 bricks. The 950,000 bricks used by Lucrezia probably included the palace, the custodian’s house, barn, stable, and associated structures. Over time, parts of structures such as the barn and stable may have been remodeled, with new grain storage facilities added to the north. Even in 1809, Casoni described the stables and barn as “rustic,” and indeed, they had probably changed little since 1519.

This interpretation of the Palazzo Borgia makes sense for a secular, aristocratic palace, but some other aspects of the building are less clear. First, missing entirely from Lucrezia’s records is any indication of decoration or painting. At least since 1506 and continuing through 1519, Lucrezia made payments for decorations, remodeling, and additions to her quarters in Castello Estense—often to prominent artists—and for work in the court garden across the moat, but not a single payment for decoration at the Palazzo Borgia appears in any of the account registers. While it is true that few registers survived, it strains credulity to imagine that no reference to decorative work at all should appear, given the four-year-long period of construction. Both a private palace and a convent in Ferrara would have been decorated in the fashion of the time, which would have included paintings on walls and ceilings and, especially, friezes along the upper parts of walls. Such ornamentation was typical of any aristocratic building in Ferrara: the ducal stables were lavishly embellished under Ercole I, hunting lodges and suburban retreats owned by the Este in the Ferrarese countryside were also richly painted, and throughout this period Alfonso I luxuriously outfitted his new suburban retreat, Belvedere, on the southwestern edge of the city. Why is there then no record of decorative work, especially painting, at the Palazzo Borgia, even though it had been inhabited at least since 1517? There are at least three possible explanations. First, since her staff lived in the palace by 1517, the last phase of the project may have been completed before 1517, and hence did not appear in the remaining records. Second, work on the decoration may have been cut short by Lucrezia’s death. Indeed, construction proceeded at a fairly measured pace, having begun in August 1515 and continued through 1518, so perhaps she was not yet ready for the outlay of additional funds for decorations. Finally, if the intention had never been to erect a palace as a representative showpiece, almost a public building, decoration would have been entirely unnecessary.

A second unusual absence is a loggia in the courtyard, or cloister. These covered spaces in convents served for prayer and meditation and as shelter during Ferrara’s hot summers and were often furnished with tables and chairs. Lucrezia’s ledgers note that from the total number of bricks, 54,275 were deducted to account for doors, windows, stairs,
and loggias. Possibly the second floor of the via Giovecca wing had a loggia facing the courtyard, or it could also have referred to an androne sufficiently wide to accommodate carriages, or other openings. In his 1605 and 1611 maps of Ferrara, Aleotti illustrated just such an opening in the set of buildings adjacent to San Silvestro, and in the 1611 version he also showed the convent as having two cloisters with colonnades. His map of six years earlier depicts one large cloister adjacent to the church. No trace of a loggia surfaces in the 1809 plan, and the loggia facing the new dormitory was not erected until 1618. Since Aleotti’s plan suffers from other major errors such as the omission of the convent of Santa Monica only a few blocks away, the most probable explanation is that Aleotti’s representation of a loggia may simply reflect his assumption that since the convent had a cortile, it must also have had a loggia. Some family palaces in Ferrara under construction in the first two decades of the sixteenth century included loggias, but many did not. In any event, if the palace’s purposes were utilitarian, the absence of a loggia makes sense.

No evidence in Lucrezia’s registers suggests she was planning to relocate to the new palace: on the contrary, painting, remodeling, and outfitting of her rooms in the Castello Vecchio continued unabated through the last year of her life. Nor does it appear that the palace was being readied as a gift in whole or in part to a relative or a retainer. On similar occasions, her account books meticulously record work on the rooms in the Castello Vecchio for her cousin Angela Borgia, or on the rooms associated with her other donzelle. In any case, the area where the convent of San Bernardino was located seems to have been populated then by pellacani (pelt workers), whose tasks were notably unpleasant and odorous, and certainly not conducive to the establishment of aristocratic residences. In 1515, via Giovecca was still a dead-end street, only partly paved and remote from other aristocratic buildings with the exception of Palazzo Schifanoia two long blocks to the south; the current gate dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century (see Figures 7, 8). Such a location—conceptually distant from the city center—was thus ideal for convents, for they were meant to be

Figure 13  San Silvestro, 1809, plan

1. 11. entrances
2. custodian’s quarters (two floors)
3. 14b, 14c, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 26, 29, 32, 35
   36. unspecified rooms
4. 24. courtyards
5. wood storage
6. 34. open areas
7. walls
8. cantina
9. two storage rooms
10. vaulted cantina with granary above
12. parlatorio
13, 16, 18. corridors
14a. refectory
14d. latrines
15, 30. staircases
21. kitchen
25. exterior church
27. bell tower
28. interior church
31. passageway
33. loggia: double-loaded corridors with fourteen cells above west wing, twenty-three cells above east wing, twenty-three cells above loggia wing, and seven bedrooms above south wing
removed from the life of the city. So perfect was the site that seven convents were clustered within just a few blocks—but for the same reasons it was less desirable for an urban princely dwelling.\textsuperscript{76} Other than the concentration of convents and small houses for widows across from the convent of Santa Maria in Mortara, this part of town was sparsely inhabited. Like the palazzina constructed by Lucrezia’s son Francesco a half-century later, popularly known as the Palazzo Marfisa d’Este, the Palazzo Borgia might have been conceived as a semi-rural retreat (see Figure 3, no. 136 across the street from San Silvestro).\textsuperscript{77}

Another possibility worth considering is that Lucrezia intended at least part of the Palazzo Borgia for the Infante Romano, Giovanni Borgia—variously identified as her brother, nephew, or son. Because of his murky origins, he depended on Lucrezia for his sustenance, and she certainly realized that if she died, he had nothing to fall back on—as seems to have been the case.\textsuperscript{78} In 1517, when he was almost twenty, Lucrezia arranged for him and his household staff to move into a palace owned by the heirs of Alberto d’Este in Borgo Nuovo.\textsuperscript{79} By this point, members of Lucrezia’s household staff already occupied the Palazzo Borgia, which suggests that had she so intended, Giovanni could also have moved there. Nothing in the accounts or in her letters suggests that she intended to house him at the Palazzo Borgia.\textsuperscript{80} On the contrary, between 1518 and 1519 she was unsuccessfully seeking a sinecure for him at the French court.\textsuperscript{81}

In his study of Lucrezia’s spirituality, Samaritani proposed yet another possibility: that she planned to erect a building to house a group of pious women living in an uncleristered community adjacent to San Bernardino. Although she was free to use the remaining land as she chose, according to the terms of the sales contract with the monks of San Bartolo, to construct a building on the site she required permission from the Franciscan Provincial Chapter and the vicar general, Cristoforo da Forli, which she obtained on 7 July 1515; the next month, construction began.\textsuperscript{82} The document notes that she was to erect a structure in part so that she would not need to stay in the monastery of San Bernardino during her spiritual retreats, and the later sales contract with the nuns of San Silvestro after her death confirms that she also intended that land that was clearly too abundant for just one convent be given over to a second.\textsuperscript{83} At some point before July 1516, the duchess commissioned a precise measurement of the entire property, specifying the lands that belonged to San Bernardino and those to be dedicated to the second convent. Pope Leo X established that the new convent could be no closer than ten \textit{braccia} (arms) from San Bernardino.\textsuperscript{84} Because of the form with which a new convent was described in most of these documents—“pious women living honestly”—it is possible to assume that this refers to a settlement other than San Silvestro.\textsuperscript{85} We must remember, however, that San Silvestro had been partially leveled and its inhabitants in need of a new home since 1512, that the Benedictine provincial chapter approved the transfer of San Silvestro in 1515, that the Franciscans approved a new building by Lucrezia the same year, and that Lucrezia began construction on her palace just one month after receiving permission.\textsuperscript{86} It seems likely that a proposal to use some of the ample terrain to resolve the problem of where to relocate San Silvestro had been floated for some time, certainly well before the provincial chapter approved the move in July 1515. No mention of such potential use appears in the original sales documents of 1509, or at any other time before demolition at San Silvestro started. If Lucrezia had planned the Palazzo Borgia as a cloistered setting for a group of pious women, the form and organization of the buildings would have differed, particularly the decidedly secular appearance of the façade and the absence of an enclosed cloister. More important, significant parts of the complex would not have maintained secular destinations for over a century, remaining, as we saw above, in the hands of the dukes and finally the Bentivoglio family. It is certainly possible that at some point she did intend to construct such a community, but changed her mind by the time construction began in 1515 and decided to use the building for other purposes. At the very least, she may well have intended to reserve part of the complex for her spiritual retreats, thereby relieving the pressure on San Bernardino and acquiring greater privacy for herself in the process.

There is another, even more intriguing possibility, because there is a secular destination for the palace that would help explain the anomalies in the building’s history noted above and would dispel any lingering suspicion that she always planned the buildings for the San Silvestro convent. Indications of the palace’s secular character emerge several times in the three remaining account books for the period between 1517 and 1519. Various entries note the presence of a granary, a larder, kitchen, pantry, large vessels for oil and wine, and substantial loads of wood brought from her landholdings in Argenta.\textsuperscript{87} In April 1517, Lucrezia paid Jacoma and Maria of Caravaggio, “bugadore [laundresses] a San Bernardino,” for the period from March to the end of April “lire marchesane 5 soldi.”\textsuperscript{88} Since at this point no nuns were living at what would become San Silvestro, and work on the palace had been under way for nearly two years, these women probably already lived there and, indeed, continued to do so well after Lucrezia’s death. The ledgers indicate that work on the doors, windows, and other
carpentry had been completed by April 1518, and the hardware for doors and windows by the end of 1517.99 Certainly by the end of September 1518, members of Lucrezia’s household had taken up residence in the complex, because wine was delivered for their use.90 In the same month, laborers transported loads of canna (reed) from her holdings in Diamantina to the San Bernardino palace, followed in August by cheese from her cows and sheep, but the form in which this event is recorded does not imply charitable contributions to the convent.91 When Lucrezia sent money or gifts to convents, such entries name either the the nuns or the convent, almost always followed by the annotation that she gave these offerings “for love of God,” a formula absent from the entries related to the Palazzo Borgia.92

The only indication of expenses that might have related to a convent surfaces in ledger entries for 1520, a year after Lucrezia’s death, for an iron grille for a parlatorio, and a roda, or wheel, a device typically used to shield nuns from public view in the parlatorio. The roda in question, however, turns out to have been for a well in the palace’s gardens, as other expenses in the same list clarify. The cost of the grille appeared within a list of expenses for the palace’s hardware installed between 1516 and 1517. It may have been intended for San Bernardino, because other unrelated expenses, such as for some of her reclamation projects and for construction work on her private apartments in the castle, appear in the same posthumous ledger under the heading of work at the Palazzo Borgia. Such errors are not uncommon, especially when the payments went to the same artisans. It is more probable that the grille was installed for San Silvestro at the same time that the expenses were recorded, that is, more than a year after Lucrezia’s death.93 Equally important, there is no evidence that Lucrezia was ever a patron of San Silvestro. On the contrary, her monthly donations of cash, cheese, and cloth went to Corpus Domini, San Bernardino, San Gabriele, San Rocco, and Sant’Agostino.94 Although she frequently retreated to a convent for prayer and meditation, she selected Corpus Domini and San Bernardino for her stays, never San Silvestro.95 For her to have spent her own income to construct a convent to which she made no other donations is simply out of the question—particularly when not a shred of evidence suggests that she did.

Why did Lucrezia build the palace? On 5 October 1517, in the presence of several of Lucrezia’s male retainers, cheese produced from her cows was weighed with a stadiera insta (scale) installed in the Palazzo Borgia and then distributed for sale to various merchants.96 This type of activity, particularly with several men present, was unthinkable in a convent, and only somewhat more likely in a private and urban princely dwelling, but altogether fitting for a commercial building. Payment to have a key made for the ortolano (market gardener) at the Palazzo Borgia in 1518 indicates that a vegetable garden was either in place or planned, perhaps to produce food for Lucrezia’s household but also possibly for donations to convents or for sale in the city’s markets.97 By 1518, she had purchased a casale (rural house) from Francesco dalle Balestre, most likely for the gardener.98 In addition to the vegetable plots the palace had a decorative garden, for which she ordered a variety of shrubs and plants.99 Delivery of large volumes of goods such as wine, coal, and wood suggests that parts of the palace served for storage, and the entry in December 1518 regarding a shipment of wine indicates that specified members of Lucrezia’s staff continued to live in the building.100 Already in March 1518, Lucrezia had paid for clothing for a servant, Giovanni Mattio, and his wife, both of whom lived in the palace, and several bolts of raw linen to be sewn and used in the palace (possibly as hangings) were consigned to Madonna Ludovica Perondelli.101 Certainly, significant amounts of materials were stored on the premises; as late as February 1519, two porters brought twelve chests of unknown contents from the Palazzo Borgia to Lucrezia’s new rooms in the Este palace.102 The Palazzo Borgia appears to have replaced an earlier canova (larder) on the via Grande that she utilized until 1516.103 Finally, there is some evidence that a brickworks was part of the complex. Lucrezia received income from brickworks associated with the construction of the Palazzo Borgia, and wood was brought by one of her boats to Ferrara “to service the brickworks of that building.”104

Just two months after Lucrezia died, Antonio dall’Olio completed construction of a filatoio (weaving factory) he was operating in rooms he rented inside the Palazzo Borgia, apparently commissioned by the duchess but completed only with the express permission of the duke following her death.105 Again, such activities supervised by men rule out the idea that the building was intended to become a convent. The filatoio may have been meant to produce the cloth Lucrezia needed to outfit her retainers and staff—for these are among the largest expenditures in her account books, but she may also have intended to use some of the wool from her sheep to produce cloth to give as alms or gifts.106 The summer after her death, work funded by the ducal chamber confirms that the brickworks and the laundry still functioned.107

How did Lucrezia imagine this expensive complex? She mentioned nothing in her letters, nor did contemporary chroniclers comment on the project. The ledger specifically documents a secular structure, and fragmentary as they are, these references point not to a convent, nor a retreat for
pious women, nor to a sumptuous residence, but to what could best be described as an urban *fattoria* (or farm production and commercial facility), with annexed structures for storage of grain and produce. Here the duchess’s many entrepreneurial activities could be conducted, from merchandising cheeses, grains, and vegetables to producing cloth and bricks, as well as more mundane chores such as laundry. Indeed, the most persuasive explanation for the complex was Lucrezia’s own burgeoning entrepreneurship, an aspect of her life that historians and biographers have completely ignored. After the conclusion of the wars with Venice and Pope Julius II, as the duchy began to recover from years of strife and privation, and as the Este emerged from the order of excommunication imposed on them by Julius II, the duchess must have begun to think about ways to increase her patrimony, and therefore her annual income, and ensure a stable and sufficient supply of grain as a hedge against the kinds of shortages that plagued the duchy between 1510 and 1518. Lucrezia’s ambitious program of acquiring marshland throughout the territory of Ferrara and draining the swamps included turning the land into productive agricultural property.

The sixteenth century could arguably be called the first century of massive land reclamation projects throughout Europe, but especially in the Po Valley, the Veneto, and Lombardy in northern Italy. Lucrezia’s projects stood at the cusp of this development, anticipating those of Venice by a quarter of a century and those of her grandson in the Po Delta by nearly fifty years. The latter endeavor, known as the Grand Este Reclamation (*La grande bonifica degli Estensi*) was the most famous and by far the largest of its time in Italy. Lucrezia’s project, though incomplete, at least equaled and possibly exceeded it in scale and, even more significantly, encompassed contemporaneous efforts over a far larger geographical area. She undertook enterprises that spanned the duchy, from Ariano in the northeast to Brancole, Donegale, Conselice, and Filo in the southeast, Marrara in the south, Redena in the southwest, and Diamantina in the northwest (Figure 14). She managed to complete only two of the reclamation projects before her death, but work proceeded at all of the sites contemporaneously, and included not only the hydraulic works but barns, granaries, worker housing, and other farm structures. The difference between her approach and that of the male Este nobility is striking. Instead of using land as a way of rewarding loyal subjects, as the Este traditionally did, by leasing it out in perpetuity for negligible rents, Lucrezia’s program envisioned the progressive capitalization of the countryside with a view to increasing her personal patrimony and hence her income. She could therefore truly be called a capitalist entrepreneur. She rented her properties for terms of one to three years, retaining flexibility and control even as she engaged her renters in pacts to help with the continuing reclamation projects. In this program, which also included the production of goods to be sold in Ferrara’s markets, a utilitarian complex such as the Palazzo Borgia would have been the ideal distribution center.

Of Lucrezia’s two projects, the convent and the palace, only a fragment of the colonnade in San Bernardino’s second
cloister remains, and of the San Silvestro only the portal now visible at another church in Ferrara, Santo Stefano (Figures 15, 16). The palace appears not to have departed significantly from other aristocratic palaces in early-sixteenth-century Ferrara; what distinguished it from the others was the patrician female patron and the nature of the activities she conducted in it: commerce and entrepreneurship rather than spectacle dictated its construction and operation.

Notes
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3. Ghirardo, “San Bernardino a Ferrara,” 386. On 31 Jan. 1510, Pope Julius II issued a brief authorizing Lucrezia Borgia to acquire the building and adjacent land for the convent, and within two weeks, a procession celebrated the arrival of nuns who transferred from the convent of Corpus Domini to their new home at San Bernardino. For the papal brief, see Archivio di Stato, Ferrara (hereafter ASFe), Archivio Notarile Antico (hereafter ANA), Notary (hereafter not.) Battista Saracco, matricola (hereafter m.) 493, pacco (hereafter p.) 31s, 1504–1556, Brief of Leo X, 31 Jan. 1510. The nuns, including Lucrezia Borgia’s niece, Camilla, the illegitimate daughter of Cesare Borgia, moved into the convent on 15 Feb. 1510. Giovanni Maria Zerbinati, Chroniche di Ferrara quali cominciano del anno 1500 sino all’anno 1527 (Ferrara, 1989), 91.


5. Even Lucrezia’s newest biographer, Sarah Bradford, dedicates several chapters to Rodrigo and Cesare: most of chapters one, three, four, and eight concern the men more than Lucrezia.

6. Other nearby convents also demolished include Ca’Bianca, Santa Caterina da Siena, Santa Caterina Martire, San Rocco, and San Vito. Records for most of these convents, often including plans, can be found in Archivio Storico del Comune di Ferrara, Serie Patrimoniale, XIX secolo, buste (hereafter b. or bb.) 24–46.

7. The first evidence of Lucrezia spending her capital in this fashion occurs
in 1516, when an inventory of her jewelry notes that she sold a gold chain to pay for the embankments at La Redena, one of the two reclamation projects actually completed during her lifetime. Archivio di Stato, Modena (hereafter ASMo), Camera Ducale Estense (hereafter CDE), Amministrazione dei Principi (hereafter Ammin. Principi), b. 1139, Inventario di gioie e altra roba, 1516–1519, carta (hereafter c. or cc.) 8: “La catena di anella contrascripta a n. 71 havea la Signora a di 2 di Settembre 1516: La quale fu disfatta per far fare le argeny dela Redena.” (The Signora took the [gold] chain marked number 71 on 2 September 1516, and sold it to pay for the embankments at the Redena.) Additional expenditures for the same purpose appear later.


10. Samuel K. Cohn, Jr., The Laboring Classes in Renaissance Florence (New York, 1980); Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy (Chicago, 1985); Dennis Romano, Housecraft and Statecraft: Domestic Service in Renaissance Venice 1400–1600 (Baltimore, 1996); Maria Serena Mazzi, Prostitutes and Lemoni nella Firenze del Quattrocento (Milan, 1991).


13. The following summary of Lucrezia’s biography is largely uncontested material that appears in the most authoritative biographies by Gregorovius, Bellonci, and most recently, Bradford (see n. 1). The only disputed material concerns the Infante Romanu, Giovanni Borgia, which I also discuss in the current article.

14. For the annulment, see Gregorovius, Lucrezia Borgia, 74–78; Giovanni Alberto della Pigna wrote to Ercole on 15 Mar. 1498 from Venice that the news from Rome was that Lucrezia had given birth to a child; since the official annulment was pronounced on 20 December 1497, she must have been about six months pregnant at the hearing.

15. In the normal course of events, a woman’s dowry was consigned to her husband on their marriage. His duty was to preserve and if possible augment the dowry, and should he precede her in death or waste her resources, she reclaimed her dowry. Whether this practice was followed in the case of Lucrezia is not clear from her remaining financial records, although she certainly retained her dowry and received additional ones from Ercole. Since her contemporaries continued to refer to her as extremely wealthy, it is possible that she also retained control of the gold ducats as well.

16. In one of the most celebrated cases a century later, Agostino Tassi responded to rape charges against him by claiming that Orazio Gentileschi committed incest with his daughter Artemisia. Mary Garrard, Artemisia Gentileschi (Princeton, 1991), 453.


18. The biographers to whom I refer are Gregorovius, Bellonci, and Bradford. Also cited in n. 1 is a catalogue edited by Laureati which recalled the sensible observations of William Roscoe in 1805, who wondered how the woman who was apparently so decadent in Rome was suddenly transformed into a model of probity and wisdom in Ferrara admired by politicians and humanists alike (164). See William Roscoe, “Dissertation on the Character of Lucrezia Borgia,” The Life and Pontificate of Leo the Tenth, vol. 1 (Liverpool, 1805).

19. The duchy’s fortunes between November 1509 and Julius III’s death in 1513 have been admirably recounted by Bradford in Lucrezia Borgia, 290–323. Speculation about Lucrezia’s possible amorous adventures with poet Pietro Bembo and her brother-in-law Francesco Gonzaga do not appear to have circulated during her lifetime.

20. The most impressive and detailed account of Ercole’s building activities in Ferrara between 1471 and 1505 can be found in Tuohey, Herceal Ferra.
Diario Pardi, dita faccio 29.

the et permuta dalla Camera Ducale alle Suore di San Silvestro.


San Bartolo was one of three monasteries Ercole intended to transfer to the Terra Nuova of Ferrara; the others were San Giorgio and San Marco. Diario Fer rasse dell’anni 1409 sino al 1502 di autori incerti, in Giuseppe Pardi, ed., Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, 24, VII, 1 (Bologna, 1928), 188. A general history of the convent of San Bernardino appears in Teodosio Lombardi, I Francescani a Ferrara. I Monasteri delle Clarisse: S. Guglielmo, Corpus Domini, S. Bernardino, S. Chiara, vol. 4 (Bologna, 1975).

Adriano Franceschini transcribed the relevant documents in his invalu able Artisti a Ferrara in età umanistica e rinascimentale. Testimonianze archivistiche. Parte II, Tomo II: Dal 1493 al 1516 (Ferrara, 1997), 327: ASFe, ANA, not. Lodovico Albar e, m. 252, p. 3, Protocollo 1498, c. 74: “in quo heditifico sic faciendo per dictum Magistrum Iacobum continetur unum claus trum cum una parte cuiusdam dormitoriui in volta et claustrum cum alius tantissi quem erunt sub dicto dormitorium etiam in volta, et facta parte dicti dormitorii subiuengendo necessarios, et in claustro predicto unum capitum, et coetrum predicti dormitoriui sit et esse debeat intutelatum ut vulgariter dictur.”

34. Cesare Borgia died in March 1507; the act legitimizing Camilla of 8 Aug ust 1509 suggests that she was born around 1502. Camilla was apparen tly consigned to the Clarissan nuns of Corpus Domini for her education sometime after her arrival in Ferrara. Angelo Bargellesi, Camilla Borgia e il Convento di San Bernardino in Ferrara (Rovigo, 1955); the 1509 act is transcribed in Arturo Giglioli, “La legitimation de Camilla Borgia,” Dep utazione Provinciale Ferrarese di Storia Patria. Atti e Memorie, n.s., 4 (1946), 113–15. It is possible that Camilla was in Ferrara as early as 1506; Lucrezia’s ledgers for 21 December 1506 note an unusual payment for a blouse for “una bambina per le suore del Corpo de Cristo” not in the category of alms, where gifts to nuns or convents were ordinarily registered, but in that of donations. Ammin. Principi, b. 1133, Giornali di dare e avere 1506, c. xxii.

35. ASMo, bb. 1131, 1507–1509, Memoria1, c. 5v, 1 Jan. 1507, “Lire 2 soldi 10” to Tadia di Benedeto “per haver facto vestire una bambina per le suore del Corpo de Cristo.”

36. ASMo, M & F, b. 50, Sq. 1508–1510, cc. 59r–62v, 15 Sept.–14 Nov. 1509, records the hardware, walls, and gates added to the convent. The ducal chamber also paid for a small amount of work to the convent in 1514, namely opening one or more doors in the external walls, at least one to the kitchen garden (orto) and the other a service entrance. ASMo, M & F, b. 55, Sq. 1514, cc. 4r, 33r, 54v.

37. Biblioteca Comunale Ariostea (hereafter BCA), Ms. Collezione Antonelli, 272, “Breve di Papa Leone X, 10 Sept. 1516; during the war with Venice in 1510, Lucrezia retreated to San Bernardino and wrote to Isabella d’Este of the duchy’s desperate state. Archivio di Stato, Mantova (hereafter ASMa), Archivio Gonzaga, Autografi, Lucrezia Borgia, b. 2, 10 Sept. 1510.

38. Zerbinati, Croniche, 91 (see n. 3).

39. ASFe, ANA, m. 374, Benedetto Codgeroni, p. 4, 1519, c. 73 (loose), 31 Oct. 1519, declaration of Paulo dal Ponte, mason, regarding unsatisfactory and incomplete work by Andrea Florato, mason, for the nuns of San Bernardino. According to the sales contract of 1521, since Lucrezia purchased the monastery for the nuns, for the remaining land “la prefacta Illa S. duchessa potesse fare quanto a lei piacesse per arbitrlo suo.” ASDF, San Silvestro, Cata astro 8, B, c. 128r., “Vendita e permuta.”


42. ASFe, ANA, m. 418, Deodato Bellia, allegato n. 2, “breve del Papa Leone X, 8 luglio 1516”: “alium plium pro congregazione mulierum pie et honeste viventium construi facere.” The first attachment was the approval received from the Benedictine order, 21 July 1515.


44. “Manefestiamo che el terreno et edifici che noi li diamo è di molto maiore pretio che non sono essi suoi beni serno ristami ducordio insieme a venderli tanta parte del ditto resto.” ASDF, San Silvestro, Cata astro 8, B, c. 129r., 19 Feb. 1521.

45. ASDF, San Silvestro, Cata astro 8, Catastro B, cc. 127r–130v; 19 Feb. 1521, “Vendita e permuta.” The church and dormitory were completed later. The earthquake of 1570 destroyed the bell tower and parts of the church, but Guarini does not mention other damage to the convent. See also BCA, Ms. Coll. Antonelli, n. 528, “Memorie del Monastero di S. Sil vestro di Ferrara.” Andrea Faoro brought this manuscript to my attention. The nuns did not receive the property for free; although Alfonso donated part of it, he exacted a six-year mortgage for 1,200 lire marchesane. Despite his decision, the nuns at San Bernardino claimed a right to the land and hence to the income from the sale, so eventually Alfonso’s factor Alfonso Troiti directed that the payment of 1,200 lire marchesane go directly to San Bernardino, a financial burden that San Silvestro did not extinguish until 1535. ASFe, ANA, not. Battista Saracco, m. 493, p. 14, 18 June 1535, petition drafted by the nuns of San Silvestro to make a public announcement that the loan had been satisfied, approved by Bartolommeo Prosperi.

46. Exactly how much money was spent for the buildings at the new convent cannot be determined from the existing document, since the broad category of fabbrica included repairs as well as constructions on other properties owned by the nuns. Nonetheless, the spike between 1520 and 1527 is notable. The building costs for the years between 1519 and 1527 were as follows: 1519: lire 479, 1520: lire 3,003, 1521: lire 1,425, 1522: lire 1,743, 1523: lire 1,145, 1524: lire 1,135, 1525: lire 806, 1526: lire 2,650, 1527: lire 2,504.

47. ASDF, San Silvestro, ser. 16, 2, “Libro Maestro di Cassa, 1518–1535”; see esp. 139v, 187r, 217v, 220v; for the consecration, “Memorie del Monastero di S. Silvestro di Ferrara,” c. 2.


49. ASMo, M & F, b. 63, 1524, c. li, 18 June, “Spezze del fenile da S. Bernardino . . . che li ha condotti 19 caretti di sabione”; c. lvi, 6 July, “Spezze del fenile da S. Bernardino per la sellega della via et per haver fatto p. 313 di sellega denani allo uso de dicto fenile”; c. 59, 16 July, “A m. Paulo del Ponte, per compoto della sellega del fenile da S. Bernardino.” When Nazarno brought barrels of wine and other materials to the convent, however, the records specify that it was for “le suore di S. Bernardino”; c. ci, 19 Nov.

50. Archivio Segreto Vaticano (ASV), Armadio XLVI, vol. 16, Inventario dei Beni di Cesare d’Este, 1598. Cesare’s possessions occupy the first thirty-
nine pages; the inventory of Alfonso’s possessions span 40r to 263v. The property in question near San Bernardino is on 216v: “Stalla già di Madama da S. Bernardino con stanza da carozza, e 2 appartamenti di camer. Casa appresso della stalla che gode M. Zanino già uscire qual è pretenduta dal C. del Cornello per intensione datogli Sua Altezza avanti morire di dar-gliela in feudo.” See also Biblioteca Vaticana, Var. Lat. 12576, f. 169, Beni di Cesare d’Este in Ferrara, 1598. No record of these specific structures appears in the less detailed lists of Alfonso I’s property nor in that of Ercole II. For Alfonso’s will, copied in many versions, see BCA, Classe (hereafter Cl.) I, no. 451, f. 11; for that of Ercole II, see ASMo, Archivio Segreto Estense, Casa e Stato, b. 329, Testamento di Ercole II, 28. A copy of this will is also in BCA, Cl. I, Ms. no. 452, recorded 13 Mar. 1558 by not. Giovan Battista Saracco, m. 493.

51. Although the Bentivoglio Family Archive at the ASFe, extending from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries, is unusually complete, no record of the family having acquired or relinquished this property appears in their property records. This leads me to believe that they simply took possession of the property, probably to house staff members and to store stocks of grain or other materials, which would have made them vulnerable to pressure from the church to leave the buildings to the convent.

52. San Silvestro, “Libro de Memorie,” c. 6, 25 June 1618: “Madre D. Olimpia Montecuolli . . . fece principiare et tirare suojo tutte le moraglie al Refetorio novo dove erano le Camare dellI. Sig.ri Bentivogli.”


54. Corpus Domini’s devastating fire of 1665 destroyed its church, while San Rocco and San Silvestro also suffered severe damage during the earthquake of 1570.


57. BCA, Ms. Collezione Antonelli, 528, “Memorie del Monastero di S. Silvestro di Ferrara,” cc. 5–9.

58. ASMo, CDE, Computistria, Memoriali, 1518–1535, c. 44, 16 Dec. 1519, recording a payment “al convento et suore de San Silvestro de la piopa borgo de Ferrara.”


60. For the Clarissan convent of Corpus Domini, founded in the early fifteenth century, see ASMo, Archivio Periti, perito Gaetano Frizzi, b. 291, plan and description by Paolo Ripamonti Carpano Ingegnera (1811).

61. Maremonti’s report to Alfonso II is transcribed in Mario Marzola, Per la storia della Chiesa Ferrarese nel secolo XVI (1497–1590) (Turin, 1978), 488–93; on San Silvestro, 491–92: “Che s’alzi il muro verso la strada pubblica da un capo all’altro sino alla chiesa per impedire la vista delle finestre del monasterio che scuoprono tutta la vicinanza.” In the official report of the apostolic visit on 22 September 1574, Maremonti specified that it was the view from Francesco d’Este’s palace across the street (Palazzina di Marfisa d’Este) that posed the problem: “Item errigi debere murum usque ad ecclesiam vergentem in plateam publicam ante palatum illi mi. D. Francisci Estensis ad altitudinem mansionis deputatae ad usum factoris supra portum comunem dicti monasterii.” I am enormously grateful to the Seminario di Ferrara for making Marzola’s books available to me.

62. For a discussion of this type, see Toselli, “I tipi di architettura civile,” 26–27 (see n. 22); she illustrates two examples of this configuration, Palazzo dei Diamanti and Palazzo Costabili.

63. There are several examples, but Palazzo Paradiso makes a ready illustration, despite subsequent baroque transformations. Erected on the site of existing medieval houses in 1391 by Alberto V d’Este, the key features of the palace in the fifteenth century were an interior square court closed on at least three sides by two-story buildings, a large salone on the first floor above the entrance block, and a ceremonial staircase near the entrance. Similar placement of stairs in fifteenth-century urban palaces can be found in Baggio Rossetti’s Palazzo Costabili (1500; popularly known as Palazzo Ludovico il Moro) and his Palazzo Roverella (1508), and Palazzo Muzzarelli Crema (begun in the late fourteenth century, radically transformed after 1540). Plans of the last three structures can be found in Bassi, Perché Ferrara è bella, 113, 122, 130 (see n. 22); for Palazzo Paradiso, see Toselli, “I tipi di architettura civile,” 24.

64. Owned in the eighteenth century by the Coccopani and later by the Massari and the Santini families, the palazzo currently houses both professional studios and private apartments.

65. Toselli, “I tipi di architettura civile,” 30, 38. This half-floor, found in Ferrarese palaces from the second half of the fifteenth century to the end of the sixteenth century, tended to disappear when the buildings were remodeled.

66. ASFe, Archivio Periti, perito Casoni, b. 146, p. 4, f. 7; the exact number was 1,538,320 bricks. When this estimate was produced, half of the church had already been sold and so was not included in the tally.

67. ASMo, CDE, Computistria, b. 51, Memoriali, Mem. ZZZ, c. 200, 519,350 bricks consigned to Baptista de Rainaldo.

68. In 1506, for example, Lucrezia paid Benvenuto Tisi da Garofalo for painting “a guazo do telle istoriate che sono andate nel cielo del camara a volta della Torre Marchesana dove stazia sua signora” in the Castello Vecchio. Ammin. Principi, b. 1130, Memoriali, 1506, c. 134r.

69. ASMo, M & F, b. 39, Memoriali, 1502, c. 61r–v, 10 Oct. 1502, with accounts of payments to “Maestro Fino e fratelli depintore” for having painted cornices and canontine in Alfonso I’s stable. Cited in Franceschini, Artisti a Ferrara, 467 (see n. 33).

70. Toselli, “I tipi di architettura civile,” 27.


72. Gian Battista Aleotti, Plan of Ferrara, 1611. BCA, xvi, 64.

73. Ammin. Principi, b. 1136, Autentiche, 1518, among many other references, see c. xviii, for example, where she paid Maestro Jacomo “fenestraro per havere messo ochii di vedro alle finestre del anticamera di sua Signora.”

74. See Ammin. Principi, b. 1136, Autentiche, 1518, c. cxviii, for expenses
related to Angela’s room and antechamber, including “meter le guerci al camarino di asse posto in anticamera et far l’architrav alusso della camera della Signora Madonna Angella.”


76. The seven convents were Santa Monica, Santa Maria delle Grazie detto di Mortara, San Rocco, San Bernardino, San Silvestro, Ca’ Bianca, and San Vito. Lucrezia’s son Francesco erected a palazzina directly across the street from San Silvestro beginning in 1539. Inherited by his daughter after his death, it is known as Palazzina di Marfisa d’Este.

77. Anna Maria Visser Travagl, Palazza di Marfisa d’Este a Ferrara (Ferrara, 1996).

78. I am loath to spill more ink on the long-standing debate about the ori- gins of Giovanni Borgia, but a brief explanation might help illustrate my argument about the palace. On 1 Sept. 1501, just when the marriage con- tract between Lucrezia Borgia and Alfonso I d’Este was being negotiated, Alexander VI issued two secret bulls, one in which he claimed Cesare was the boy’s father, and a second in which he claimed paternity for himself. Both of these documents ended up in Lucrezia’s hands in Ferrara. Lucrezia regularly ordered clothes and other items for her son Rodrigo (legitimate heir of her second husband, Alfonso d’Aragona, duke of Bisceglie) as well as for Giovanni, and by early 1506 at the latest Giovanni was in Ferrara. If he was not her son, she demonstrated an unusually consistent attentiveness to his well-being, comparable to that which her records document for Rodrigo, and quite different from that acceded to other Borgia orphans. No jewelry or gold went to the others, but she did give Giovanni gold and jewelry. There are few indications of clothing or gifts specifically for Cesare’s illegitimate children—Girolamo, a page in Alfonso’s court, and Camilla—or her half-brother Rodrigo Borgia, all equally as unfortunate in their births as Giovanni was in his. The two papal bulls have been tran-scribed in the most recent Italian edition of Gregorovius, Lucrezia Borgia (Rome, 2004), 266–71, an edition unfortunately littered with errors, typo- graphic and otherwise; for an account of the circumstances surrounding the possible birth of Giovanni, see Gregorovius, Lucrezia Borgia, 126–27, and Belloni, Lucrezia Borgia, 147–54 (see n. 1).

Lucrezia’s financial records between 1506 and 1519 repeatedly docu- ment expenses for Giovanni Borgia. Ammin. Principi, b. 1133, Giornali di dare e avere 1506, c. 4v, 26 Apr. 1506, “lire 5 soldi 18 dinari 3" for a velvet hat for “Don Zohane Borgia”; c. xxx, 13 June 1506, the records note that he was in Carpi; c. 11, on 31 Oct. 1506, she spent 8 lire 2 soldi to have a serv- ant go to Carpi to collect Don Zohane Borgia and his things and bring him to Ferrara. This took place several months before Cesare’s death, but there are other records of travel between Carpi and Ferrara for Giovanni, evidently during the years he was in the care of Alberto Pio da Carpi.

79. Ammin. Principi, b. 1132, Memoriali, 1517–1519, c. xxx, 5 Dec. 1517. 80. The ample body of letters from Lucrezia conserved at the State Archives in Modena and Mantua give no hint of her intentions for the palace, and they also fail to discuss Giovanni Borgia except in passing. ASMo, Archivio Segreto Estense, Casa e Stato, Carteggio tra Principi Estensi, b. 141; ASMa, Archivio Gonzaga, Autografi, Lucrezia Borgia, bb. 1–4. Nine letters from Lucrezia Borgia to her father, Pope Alexander VI, in 1494 are at the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, AA, Armadio I–XVIII, b. 5027.

81. A letter from Alfonso to Lucrezia in December 1518 reported that Gio- vanni had arrived in Paris, and Alfonso would do his best to help him secure a post; Alfonso’s secretaries and companions Alfonso Ariosto and Bonaven-
that several different expense reports came in on the same day. The system led to tidy and organized account books, but also to the occasional mixing of several jobs.

94. Ammin. Principi, b. 1135, Autenticchio, 1508, c. xvi, 15 Nov. 1508. The Este in general were benefactors primarily to convents with which they had historical connections, either because they founded them or because members of their family resided in them. Lucrezia founded San Bernardino, for example, and here her niece Camilla Borgia took vows and Ercole I's brother Sigismondo was buried. Ercole I founded Santa Caterina da Siena. Corpus Domini was Eleonora d'Aragona's special retreat in the city, and Lucrezia often retreated there or to San Bernardino in times of personal difficulty such as the deaths of her father or her children. Lucrezia's only daughter, Eleonora, took vows at Corpus Domini and, later, so did her granddaughter Lucrezia, the illegitimate daughter of Ercole II d'Este. Lucrezia Borgia and Alfonso I were both buried in Corpus Domini. In his will, Ercole II d'Este left donations to San Bernardino, Santa Monica, Ca' Bianca, Corpus Domini, San Rocco, San Gabriele, Santa Caterina da Siena, and San Vito—conspicuously, not to San Silvestro. ASMo, Archivio Segreto Estense, Casa e Stato, b. 329, Testamento di Ercole II, 2. Only when the nuns at San Silvestro were attempting to pave the floor of their church in 1534 and 1535 did they receive modest donations from Alfonso I d'Este and from his mistress, Laura Dianti. ASDF, San Silvestro, ser. 16, 2, "Libro Maestro di Cassa, 1518–1535," 218.

95. During the war with Venice, Lucrezia wrote to Isabella d'Este about the dangers the duchy was facing; she wrote from the San Bernardino convent. ASMo, Archivio Gonzaga, Autografi, b. 3, x, Sept. 1510.


97. Ammin. Principi, b. 1136, Autenticchio, 1518, c. xviii, 24 July 1518.

98. Ammin. Principi, b. 1136, Autenticchio, 1518, c. cvx, 6 Dec. 1518.

99. Ammin. Principi, b. 1136, Autenticchio, 1518, c. 114v, 6 Dec. 1518, payment of "lire 40 soldi 5" to Bigo Tason for plants "che lui dice havere fatto piantare nel casale comprato da Francesco dalla Balestri per zardino del ditto loco de commissione di sua Extia."

100. Ammin. Principi, b. 1136, Autenticchio, 1518, c. cxv, 16 Dec. 1518.


102. Ammin. Principi, b. 1136bis, Conto Generale 1519, c. xiv, 16 Mar. 1519.

103. ASMo, M & F, 58, 1516, c. lxxixiiii, 20 Sept. 1516, notes cartage charges for materials delivered to her canova on via Grande.

104. Ammin. Principi, b. 1132, Memoriali, 1517–1519, c. 3, 27 Feb. 1517, c. 11v, 19 May 1517, on the income to the Borgia Palace from calcina (stucco) and prede (bricks) from Lucrezia's fornace at the palace, and c. xxviii, 8 Apr. 1518, "per bizigono dela fornaxa dela dita fabrica."

105. Ammin. Principi, 18 Sept. 1519, c. xlvii, "Ill.ma nostra signora, per el conto dele fede che se fano lavorare per il bizigono della guardaboba da sua signora debe dare a di dito Antonio dall'olio I. 141 di marchesane maragone per tanti della valuta d'uno filatoio et ofito in quello lavora a 3 vargi che lui a fato a sua s. del suo ligname e ferramenta a tute suo opera et spexe in una chamara posta interno nel palazzo de sua S a Sto Bernardino, sino da di 25 agosto sino ad 5 di dicembre all dito ano." The rent was deducted from his expenses in setting up the room and building the fabricio. Lucreizia shipped three barrels of red wine from Rome with other goods that had to clear customs in Venice before being sent on to Ferrara. Ammin. Principi, b. 1136, Autenticchio, 1519, c. 14r, 27 Mar. 1519.

106. Cloth itself was a form of wealth during this period; dowry contracts enumerated bolts of cloth and clothing, and Lucrezia pawned bolts of expensive cloth when she needed cash. Ammin. Principi, b. 1133, Giornali di dare e avere 1506, c. 99r, 7 Apr. 1506, for payment of "lire 50 e soldi" for damasks she had pawned.

107. M & F, b. 62, 16 July 1519, c. 135r, 30 July 1519, c. 143r.

108. The term fattoria means farm; in this context, by urban fattoria I mean an urban farm complex. No English word captures the range of meanings collapsed into this one structure: located in the city, it nonetheless was dedicated to farm-related activities and commercial enterprises, including a weaving factory and brickworks, and as noted above, rooms the duchess might have used for spiritual retreats.

109. The story of Lucrezia Borgia's entrepreneurial activities is the subject of a book I am writing. The city of Ferrara dedicated the year 2002 to Lucrezia Borgia on the five-hundred-year anniversary of her arrival in the city. In connection with these celebrations, the Archivio di Stato, Ferrara, presented an exhibition of documents related to her during the spring of 2003, curated by Franco Cazzola and Antonietta Folchi, director of the Archives. Transcriptions of some of the documents were made available in a photocopied brochure, "Il patrimonio di Lucrezia Borgia. Aspetti dell'economia privata di una donna del Rinascimento"; a more detailed catalogue is in preparation. For further discussion of some of her agricultural enterprises, see Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, "Le bufele estensi e l'imprenditoria femminile ducale nella Ferrara del Rinascimento," Bollettino della Ferrarrate Deca 20 (Dec. 2003), 68–85, including information on some of her reclamation projects.

110. The literature on European reclamation projects during the sixteenth century is vast; a recent compilation of essays provides a broad overview and an excellent up-to-date bibliography: Alessandra Fiocca, Daniela Lambergi, and Cesare Maffioli, eds., Arte e scienza delle acque nel Rinascimento (Venice, 2003); see esp. Salvatore Ciricione, "Transfert tecnologique, économie et institutions dans les écluses cinquantenerennes. Quelques lignes comparatives sur les levèes européennes" (3–14), and Franco Cazzola, "Le bonifiche cinquantenerennes nella valle del Po. Governare le acque, creare nuova terra," 15–36.


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