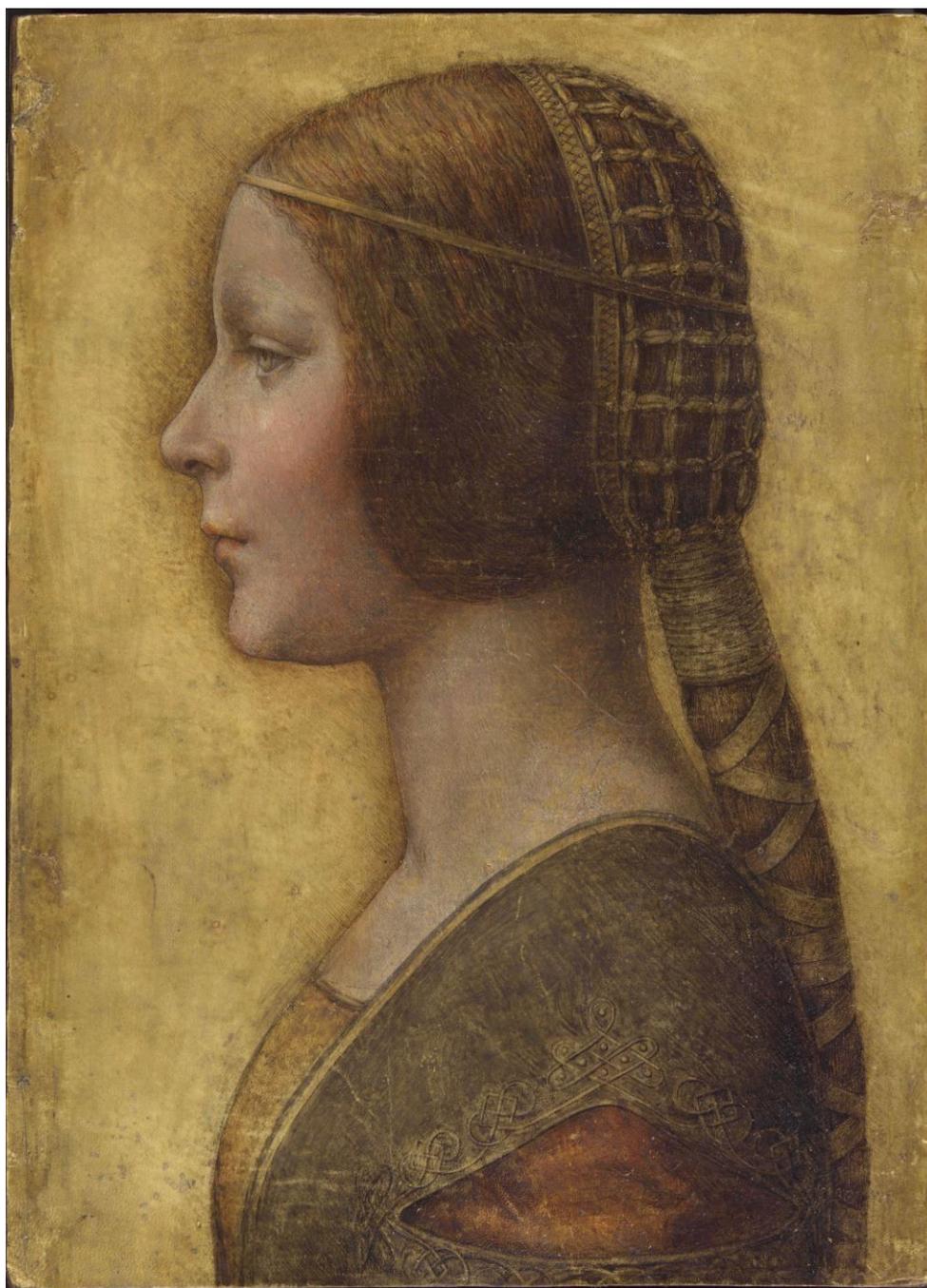


*LEONARDO DA VINCI  
LA BELLA PRINCIPESSA.*

*ERRORS, MISCONCEPTIONS, AND ALLEGATIONS  
OF FORGERY*



by  
MARTIN KEMP

Following the publication and widespread media publicity about the portrait of a young Milanese woman on vellum, dubbed *La Bella Principessa*, it is worth taking stock, not least to assess the kinds of arguments that have been deployed. Of the denunciations of the attribution to Leonardo, the most sustained has been that by Katarzyna Krzyżagórska-Pisarek in her “*La Bella Principessa. Arguments against the Attribution to Leonardo*”, *Artibus et Historiae*, XXXVI, 215, pp. 61–89. The essay that follows concentrates on her article, though many of the points can be extended to other more fragmented arguments against Leonardo’s authorship, particularly the assertions that it is a forgery. An earlier draft of this essay was submitted in November 2015 to *Artibus et Historiae* but was rejected on the basis that “it won’t fit in our pages” because it is “an errata list”.

At the end of this essay is an appendix that briefly addresses the extraordinary claims by Shaun Greenhalgh that he forged the portrait in 1978.

The intention here is not engage with more discursive arguments about the attribution according to criteria of “connoisseurship”, but rather to deal with mistakes, misconceptions and a series of false allegations. Many of these errors could have been avoided by a careful reading of the two books published on the portrait (see below) and other normal checks.

After a bibliographic note, the numbered points pick up the more substantial arguments in the article, broadly following the order in which they appeared.

### 1) **Bibliographical**

Pisarek cites and quotes most of her material from the internet. The main extended and comprehensive analyses of the portrait are in the two books by Martin Kemp and Pascal Cotte, *La Bella Principessa. The Story of the New Masterpiece by Leonardo da Vinci* published by Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2010 (cited only once by Pisarek in note 50), and the revised edition that contained full accounts of the evidence linking the portrait with the *Sforziad* in Warsaw, *La Bella Principessa di Leonardo da Vinci. Ritratto di Bianca Sforza*, published by Madragora, Florence, 2012 (not cited at all). The author addresses none of the scientific evidence in the two books that relates to the lower layers of the image, the *pentimenti* or the condition and retouching in various media. Contrary to Pisarek’s assertions, the interventions of at least two campaigns of restoration are documented in both books. It should be noted that further technical evidence is published in the catalogue of the exhibition at the Galleria Nazionale in Urbino.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> M. Kemp with V. Sgarbi, *Leonardo da Vinci. Ritratto di Bianca Sforza, “La Bella Principessa”*, exhibition catalogue, Palazzo Ducale, Urbino, 2014 (also in French, Spanish, Polish, Russian, Japanese).

Significant contributions by Cristina Geddo are ignored, including *Leonardo da Vinci: the extraordinary discovery of the lost portrait. The rationale for authentication. A Lecture*, Société genevoise d'études italiennes, Geneva, Palais de l'Athénée, Salle des Abeilles, 2 October 2012, 38 pp.

(available at <http://www.lumiere-technology.com/therationaleforauthentication.pdf>), which reviews the arguments, independently of whether the portrait came from the *Sforziad*.

The author also seems to be unaware of the important contributions of the costume historian, Elisabetta Gnignera, in her *I soperchi ornamenti. Copricapi e acconciature femminili nell' Italia del Quattrocento*, Siena, 2010, pp. 168-79, which accords *La Bella Principessa* a supreme position in the depiction of a *coazzone* (bound pigtail). Gnignera is publishing a full account of the costume and hairstyle of the portrait in her book, *La Bella svelata : vesti, acconciatura e cosmèsi* (Scripta Manent).

See also the contributions of Mina Gregori, Cristina Geddo and Elisabetta Gnignera in the exhibition catalogue, Monza, Villa Reale, *La Bella Principessa di Leonardo da Vinci. Ritratto di Bianca Sforza*, M. Kemp and V. Sgarbi, Reggio Emilia, 2015.

## 2) Provenance

The portrait was committed for sale at Christie's New York in 1998 by the late Jeanne Marchig. It was the last of the items that remained from those collected by her husband, Giannino Marchig, the painter and respected restorer. She was devoting the proceeds of the sales to her animal rights charity. She founded the Jeanne Marchig International Centre for Animal Welfare Education at the University of Edinburgh and was awarded an honorary degree by the University.<sup>2</sup> There is not the slightest evidence to impugn the integrity of the Marchigs in any of their work and no indication that either would knowingly be involved in forgery. If either or both of them had been involved in forging a "Leonardo", it is strange that neither at any time advocated Leonardo's authorship before its sale.

## 3) The assertion that there is an "almost total absence of close comparisons with unimpeachable works by Leonardo."

The first edition (pp. 47-71) and the revised Italian edition (pp.33-51) contain detailed stylistic comparisons with key works by Leonardo, his circle and other Milanese artists. Very detailed comparisons in handling and technique are made with the portrait of *Cecilia Gallerani*, allowing for the obvious difference in media. The stylistic comparisons are not discussed in this present essay, but those made by Pisarek and others hostile to the attribution seem to me to support the attribution rather than undermine it.

## 4) The lack of records of Leonardo making the drawing

All Leonardo's known works are "unrecorded in his writings" apart from the *Battle of Anghiari*, when he recalled a storm that disrupted his work. The lack of early records of its being viewed is explained by its presence within a book, within which it remained until its excision, probably in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The record of the book in major Polish book collections begins in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when it was owned by the

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.marchigtrust.org/index.htm>

great Jan Zamoyski (1542-1605), as an inscription of the recto of the first vellum folio indicates.

5) ) **“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 author’s narrative of an extensive search is imaginary, as is clearly evident in the Italian edition of the book. No such search or searches were undertaken, beyond trying to adduce what *type* of manuscript or book it might have come from, since “the possibility of matching the portrait to a surviving book did not seem not encouraging”. We only considered the Warsaw *Sforziad*, a book printed on vellum, *after* Professor D.R. Edward Wright independently suggested the link on the basis of his knowledge of the iconography of the frontispiece.

6) **Forging a Leonardo? “The study of antique art led him [Marchig] 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”**

The underlying implication throughout Pisarek’s article is that the portrait is a forgery. The author implies that the late Giannino, as “a Leonardesque painter” is the prime suspect. The author is aligning herself with Michael Daley of Artwarch: “as the only known owner of a work with a five centuries-long provenance lacuna, Giannino Marchig must be considered as a potential Leonardo forger... Nothing material here might refute a suggestion that Marchig was the drawing’s author, working on old vellum that was at some point attached to an old, previously repaired and labelled panel, thereby conferring a spurious antiquity and concealing the back of the vellum.”<sup>3</sup> These allegations are unfounded and unsupported by any evidence.

It is bizarre that anyone meticulously and elaborately forging a Leonardo should not subsequently promote Leonardo’s authorship. Jeanne Marchig testified that her husband kept the portrait in a portfolio or folder and did not hang it on his walls, probably to protect it from light. She hung it in her study. There is no indication that Giannino ever suggested it was by Leonardo or specifically promoted it as such for any purpose, financial or otherwise. Jeanne Marchig indicated to Christie’s that her husband thought it might be by Domenico Ghirlandaio, but she acquiesced reluctantly to its being identified as a German 19<sup>th</sup>-century pastiche for the auction. She never considered or mentioned Leonardo as a potential author. When she later learnt of the Leonardo attribution, she sued Christie’s. After a complex and technical legal battle, Christie’s eventually settled out of court, to the benefit of her animal charity.

Leonardo’s characteristic hand-print technique of blending in the flesh tones, visible in the portrait only by infra-red reflectography and multispectral imaging - would not have been forged pre-1949 (when Marchig took the portrait with him to Switzerland),

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<sup>3</sup> <http://artwatch.org.uk/author/artwatchuk/>

since his widespread deployment of the technique was not known until later. It is also unlikely that a forger in the first half of the century would have known to fortify himself or herself against the technique of carbon dating and other diagnostic methods. Particularly conclusive is a lead isotope dating carried out by the University of Pavia in January 2011.<sup>4</sup> This relies upon the half-life of the lead isotope 210. A sample of the white lead pigment indicates that the pigment is more than 250 years old.

#### **7) Pisarek's reliance on Julia Cartwright**

It is widely recognised that Julia Cartwright's work, including her 1910 book on Beatrice d'Este, is based on fine research but that the final text is embroidered in a highly romantic way, including her imaginative telling of Bianca's story. Her identification of the Ambrosiana profile portrait of a woman (with hair net [*reticella*] and pearls) as Bianca Giovanna Sforza, is not supported by any evidence, and it is surprising that Pisarek revives this unsupported identification with such confidence.

#### **8) Bianca Maria Sforza and earlier scholarship**

The identification of the sitter of *La Bella Principessa* as Bianca Maria Sforza, Ludovico's niece, and dating of c.1490 by Alessandro Vezzosi and Nicholas Turner pre-dates the research into the *Sforziad*, the implications of which they now accept. This could have been readily checked.

#### **9) Cutting out the portrait from the *Sforziada* in Warsaw**

The most likely time for the removal of the portrait is during the rebinding of the book in the early nineteenth century, as researches by Kasia Woźniak will show, when many manuscripts and books were pillaged in this way in many countries. No shame accrues to the National Library, the present owner of the *Sforziad*, or to Poland more generally. The staff of the library were and are apparently unwilling to countenance the "defacing" of one of their "national treasures". This reluctance characterises Polish responses, exemplified by Pisarek's article in the Polish periodical *Artibus et Historiae*.

Vellum is very tough to cut, as anyone has handled it will testify. Using a sharp blade to separate the folio from the double sheet, more than one incision is likely to be needed, and it is easy for the blade to slip under the requisite pressure, just as can be seen in the bottom left corner.

#### **10) The foliation of the *Sforziada* and the inserted paper pages**

It should be noted that the *Sforziad* is a printed book, an *incunabulum*, printed on vellum, not a "codex" or a "manuscript".

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<sup>4</sup> Università degli Studi di Pavia, Dipartimento di Chimica Generale, *Misure del 210Pb mediante Spettrometria Gamma Diretta*, January 2011, p. 48. There is also a very detailed report undertaken in advance of its exhibition in Italy, which discloses additional pentimenti, clear indications of the extent of successive restorations and other technical evidence of the antiquity of the image on vellum and its backing board: *La Bella Principessa. Dossier tecnico di consegna*, Centro di Conservazione e Restauro, Venaria Reale, Turin, 19 June, 2014.

The pioneering work of the Polish scholar, Horodyski, is rightly to be admired, but his account of the foliation is not accurate. The vellum printings of the *Sforziad* were originally bound in quires or gatherings of 4 sheets (i.e. 8 folios and 16 pages), with the exception of the last quire, which has only 2 sheets. The 26 quires are numbered by the printer. The quires in this book are labelled *a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, x, y, z, &, C, R*, and each of the first four folios in each quire after the first are marked *i, ii, iii and iv* to help the binder keep the sheets in the right order. Close analysis of the first quire in the Warsaw version by Pascal Cotte, using macrophotography and depth mapping (fully published in the Italian edition pp. 141-152) demonstrates conclusively that the outer double sheet of the first quire has been removed, together with the second folio of the sheet immediately below it. The first folio of the second sheet has been pasted back in to retain a side of printed text (fig.1). This is not open to the slightest doubt – unless the paper page inserted later as the first folio is counted as vellum, as the Pisarek astonishingly does.

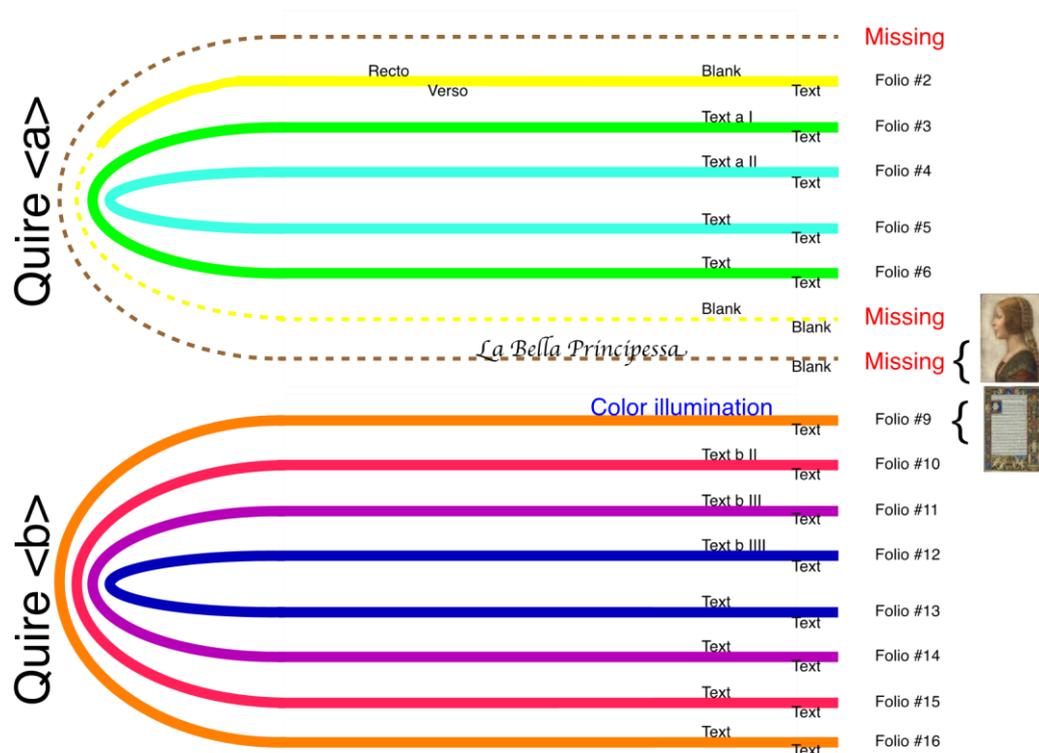


Diagram of the first two quires in the Warsaw *Sforziad* (courtesy of Pascal Cotte)

Comparisons with the first quires of the London and Paris books decisively confirms the removal of the three folios in the Warsaw version.

It is to be noted that fig. 7 in Pisarek’s article (carrying the date 1490), and figs. 10 and 11 illustrate a *paper* folio inserted during a rebinding, not a sheet of *vellum*. The assertion that fig.10 shows the “smooth and white... vellum”, which “is quite smooth and looks more like fine paper” (which is what it is), is negligent in the extreme. Distinguishing paper from vellum is not difficult - unless reproductions are used. What Pisarek later (p.77) calls “the first blank folio” is the inserted paper folio!

The date of 1490 on fig. 7 records that of the Italian edition printed on paper, and naturally appears in the versions printed on vellum, but it is not the date of the four special editions, as Horodyski recognised.

Pisarek inaccurately states that “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”. The reconstruction shows that the portrait would have faced a blank page.

### 11) **Iconography**

Again Horodyski’s pioneering work is again fully recognised, but his analysis of the iconography of the title page / frontispiece by Birago has been superseded in the light of more detailed knowledge of Sforza court iconography and analyses by later scholars, including Wright. In particular, his identification of the GZ initials in the Warsaw frontispiece with **Gian Galeazzo** (i.e. GG or IG) is incorrect. GZ = Galeazzo, i.e. Galeazzo Sanseverino, Bianca’s husband. The supposed “rain of tears flowing down the handkerchief”, said to denote a tone of mourning, is one of the standard Sforza *impresa* and has no funerary connotations. The hairy wild men bearing the primary shield with the *impresa* were specifically favoured by Galeazzo as we know from the *festa* that Leonardo designed at the Sanseverino palace.<sup>5</sup>

### 12) **Betrothal and Marriage**

It is misleading (and misunderstands Renaissance marriage protocols) to say (p. 56) that Bianca Sforza and Galeazzo Sanseverino were “married” on “31 December 1489”. On 14 December 1489, the chronicle of Donato Bosso records that the Duke has legitimised his illegitimate daughter, Bianca, who was six or seven years old, and promised her in marriage to Galeazzo Sanseverino. On 10 January 1490, Bosso records that the couple were betrothed “with magnificent and solemn pomp”.<sup>6</sup> The consummation of marriage was completed by the move of the bride to her husband’s house in 1496. It would be good to find an account of the celebrations on both occasions.

### 13) **The Technique**

It is claimed here and regularly elsewhere that Leonardo never worked on vellum. If so it would be an odd choice for a forger. In fact his illustrations for Luca Pacioli’s *De Divina Proportione* in 1496 are on vellum in ink with coloured washes in both the Milan and Geneva manuscripts, and involve many of the same technical challenges posed by the portrait. The prime manuscript version in the Ambrosiana is dedicated to Galeazzo Sanseverino, husband of Bianca.

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<sup>5</sup> Paris, Institut de France, Ms C 15v.

<sup>6</sup> Donato Bosso, *Chronica*, Milan, Antonio Zaroto, 1492:

<http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k59530g/f325.item.zoom>. I am grateful to Elisabetta Gnignera for this reference.

As we know Leonardo specifically wrote about the problem of “dry colouring” in coloured chalks, and proposed to ask the French painter Jean Perréal for advice.<sup>7</sup> It is anachronistic to translate *carte impaste* in the note as pasteboard or cardboard. *Carta / carte* are terms used for vellum sheets, as in the first of Petrarch’s poems on the portrait of *Laura* by Simone Martini, and other poetry on Renaissance images on vellum.<sup>8</sup> It seems likely that the whole of the note (quoted only in part), including the question of how to obtain single and many double sheets is dealing with vellum and the problems posed by irregularly shaped skins.

Coloured chalks (not “pastels”) can be fixed effectively with gum arabic, a technique we have shown to work in practice. We tested the use of gum arabic both as a toned priming for the vellum and as a fixative for the chalks. In 2010 the artist Sarah Simblet of the Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art in Oxford experimentally reconstructed the technique using Leonardo’s known media for Japanese and American television programmes. She found that a gum priming provided the right base for the drawing, tinted with some burnt umber. The visual qualities of the drawing were all successfully emulated using iron gall inks and chalks of the kind available to Leonardo, as is clear in the Italian edition of the book by Kemp and Cotte.

Our detailed first-hand examination of the vellum in the portrait and the book using magnification, spectral analysis and a micrometer, rather than comparing reproductions or internet images, confirmed that the vellum under the priming is very similar to that in the book, allowing for the likelihood that the portrait has been exposed outside the protective confines of the book since the early nineteenth century. Pisarek has not inspected the original vellum of *La Bella Principessa* nor asked to do so.

The next step would be DNA analysis, though it should be born in mind that adjacent sheets in the book might well not have come from the same animal. The removal of the vellum from the backing board to which it has been adhered with a glue of unknown composition would be desirable, but has been deemed too hazardous by an expert conservator.

#### 14) Dimensions

Recorded measurements taken with rulers are notoriously unreliable, and the pages of the Warsaw *Sforziad* are not of constant dimensions. Our published measurements were taken from the originals and cross-checked with dimensionally accurate digital images. We stand by them. The ruler on the library’s online version is laid on the added *paper* page at the beginning of the book, and cannot be used reliably to calculate the size of the vellum folios, as Pisarek has apparently done.<sup>9</sup> During our studies at the National Library, we inserted a precise facsimile of the portrait into the relevant opening of the book (fig. 129 in the Italian edition) where the size matched very closely. This can now be confirmed with the very precise facsimiles of the

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<sup>7</sup> Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Codice atlantico, 669r

<sup>8</sup> The poems are to be discussed in M. Kemp and G. Pallanti, *Mona Lisa. The People and the Portrait*, forthcoming, Oxford University Press. <sup>9</sup> <http://polona.pl/item/1520897/4/>

portrait and Warsaw book published by Scripta Maneant.<sup>9</sup> There is a necessary qualification to such matching, since the book has been trimmed as has the portrait (very evident from the severing of the knot pattern at the base but less evident at the right margin), most probably during one of the acts of rebinding. The irregular margins around the frontispiece confirm the trimming.

The measurement of the distance between the stitch holes, cited in the Italian edition with margins for error, are more reliable than the “about 5.5 cm” apparently based on internet images. The inserted paper folio is used to illustrate the stitching (Pisarek fig.11), and this is the page on which a ruler has been placed in the online version. The line between the stitch holes is not parallel to the right edge of the sheet, which explains why the lowest of them is the most clearly apparent inside the left margin (fig. 2). The irregularity and extensive damage along the left margin explains why two of the five stitch holes are no longer clearly discernible.

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<sup>9</sup> M. Kemp with V. Sgarbi and C. Strinati, “Bianca and the Book”, introduction to the facsimile edition of the *Commentarii rerum gestarum Francisci Sfortiae (La Sforziada)*, Warsaw, National Library, published by Scripta Maneant, Reggio Emilia, in 2015.

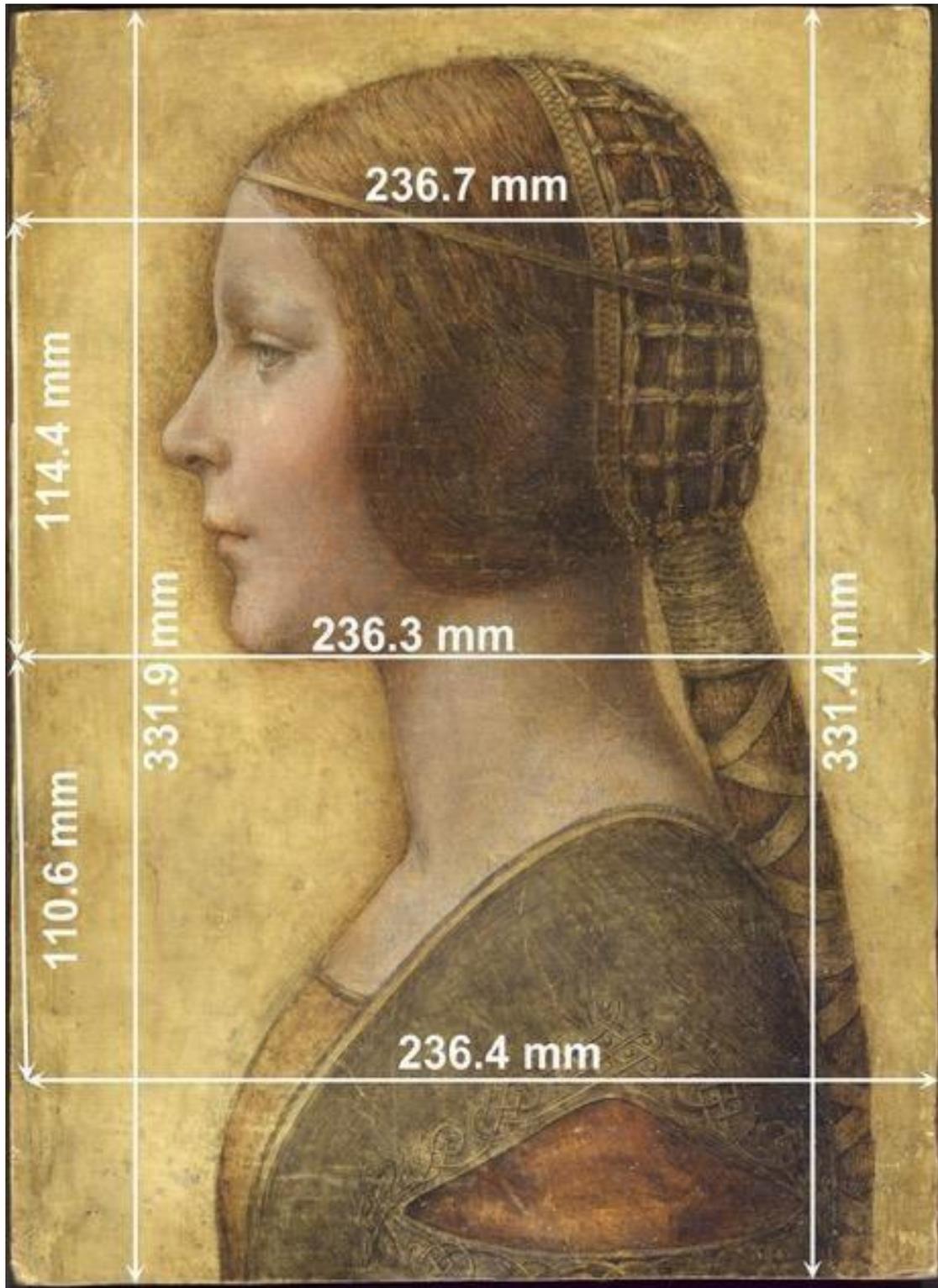


Fig 2. *Dimensions of the portrait, showing the alignment of the stitch holes on the left* (courtesy of Pascal Cotte)

### 15) **The profile and the cartoon portrait of Isabella d'Este**

Leonardo was of course very engaged with profiles as a form of characterisation, not least in his series of grotesques. All members of the inner circle of the Sforza family were portrayed in profile, and a very formal portrait in a presentation volume would certainly not be an exception. When he made a cartoon (necessarily on paper) for the

portrait of Isabella d'Este in Mantua in 1500 after leaving Milan, the profile portrayal was still *de rigueur* in the North Italian courts for members of the ruling families. Pisarek's statement that the portrait of Isabella "shows a different technique, with many repaints" confirms her weak grasp of Renaissance drawing techniques.

The very formal portrait in the book, highly worked up in a special medium on vellum, is quite different in function from the cartoon on paper, which, as we know from the version in the Ashmolean, was subject to further modification.<sup>10</sup> Allowing for these differences of medium, support and function, the resemblance between the two profiles remains very striking, especially when viewed in the original.

#### 16) **Left-handedness**

It is obvious that copyists, imitators and forgers could use left-handed hatching – though the slight curvature of the lines generally betrays whether the hatching is drawn by a right-hander or left-hander. The left-handed execution (with extensive right-handed retouching) supports but does not prove the attribution. It certainly cannot be used to undermine the attribution.

#### 17) **The costume**

The costume of "*La Bella Principessa*" is quite simple compared to those in the portraits of Beatrice and Bianca Maria. It was expected that new wives would be dressed in a restrained manner after the consummation of their marriage. The highly convincing aspects of the sartorial presentation of the sitter, above all the brilliantly "engineered" hairstyle, are fully endorsed by Elisabetta Gigniera who concludes that "we can convincingly place the style of costume depicted in *La Bella Principessa*, in the milieu of the Sforza court in Milan during the stay of Beatrice d'Este in the years 1491 to 1497".<sup>11</sup> Above all, she points out that the simple aperture at the edge of the shoulder in the sitter's Spanish-style overgown (*mongino*) is comparable to those in the marble busts by Francesca Laurana of *Bastista Sforza* (Museo del Bargello) and of an unknown woman in the Frick Collection. In making any judgements about the overgown, its ornamentation and the articulation of the sitter's shoulder, we need to take into account the extensive damage and re-touching in this area of the portrait, as confirmed by the scientific examinations.

#### 17) **The Fingerprint**

The forensic identification by Paul Biro of the fingerprint in the upper left margin of the vellum sheet in the first edition of the book was not retained in Italian edition, since its resemblance to prints in the unfinished *St Jerome* seemed inconclusive, and we cannot at this point establish a reliable set of reference prints for Leonardo. The clear evidence of imprints of the side of the artist's right palm in the flesh tones was retained, since this procedure is highly characteristic of Leonardo, as is apparent in the *Ginevra de' Benci*, *Cecilia Gallerani* and *Salvator Mundi*.

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Kemp and Thereza Wells, *Leonardo da Vinci's Madonna of the Yarnwinder. A Historical and Scientific Detective Story*, London, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Personal communication. See also above section 1.

### 18) **On Method**

On matters of method, readers are directed to the final chapter in the English and Italian editions, “What constitutes Proof”, and to the paper delivered to the Authentication in Art Congress at The Hague in May 20014, which looks at the relationship between scientific and other kinds of evidence in the processes of attribution.<sup>12</sup> No discrete piece of evidence provides conclusive proof, as is usual in such cases, but the accumulative build-up of different types of evidence that allows us to recognise *La Bella Principessa* as a portrait of Bianca Sforza is exceptionally strong.

### 19) **The damaging allegation in the opening to Pisarek’s article that the owner was to set up “non-profit-making foundation for multi-disciplinary Classical and Renaissance studies near Florence, to be headed by Professor Martin Kemp”.**

The cited article in *Antiques Trade Gazette* in 2009 indicating that I was to benefit personally by becoming the head of such a foundation was and is without foundation. As indicated on my website, I never have any financial involvement of any kind in any of the researches I undertake, and do not even accept expenses.<sup>13</sup> I do not run an authentication service, but research items of special interest regardless of ownership.

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<sup>12</sup> “Science and Judgement by Eye in the Historical Identification of works of Art”, <http://www.authenticationinart.org/congress-2014/congress-papers/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.martinjkemp.com/terms.html>, see section 8

## APPENDIX: “FORGED BY GREENHALGH”

Sean Greenhalgh is a prolific forger of great dexterity and ingenuity who was sentenced in 2007 to four years and eight months in prison. He was particularly adept at forging sculptural objects from old and exotic civilizations. Born in Bolton in 1961, he was self-taught as an “artist”, and operated a world-wide business out of his modest family home. The wooden shed in which he confected his forgeries was reconstructed in a display of “The Metropolitan Police Service’s Investigation of Fakes and Forgeries” in the Victoria and Albert Museum from 23 January to 21 February 2010.<sup>14</sup>

In 2015 Greenhalgh’s rather rambling memoirs were published as *A Forger’s Tale*.<sup>15</sup> Rather curiously, his book is not illustrated by photographs of his creations but by a few tipped-in drawings in line and coloured wash. After almost 330 pages of the main body of the book, Greenhalgh devotes a little over three pages in a “Postscript” to the story of how he forged *La Bella Principessa*. His picturesque account gained a good deal of media attention, having originally been released to *The Sunday Times* for promotional purposes.<sup>1618</sup> Since the book was published in a limited edition in two very short print runs and is not widely available, a summary is warranted.

Greenhalgh tells how in 1978, when he was seventeen years old, he decided to “try my hand at an ‘Old Master’ drawing... Not particularly a ‘Leonardo’”. He obtained an old vellum document of 1587 and sanded off the writing. He used the “hair side” for his drawing. He drew the image with black, white and red chalks based in gum arabic, “with the carbon black gone over with iron gall ink”. He rotated the vellum so that he could shade it in an apparently left-handed manner, in order that it appeared to be “a bit Leonardo-like”. He chose as his model “Bossy Sally from the Co-op ... a glazed and bored girl at the supermarket checkout”, presenting her in a “typical Milanese court dress of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century”. He then mounted the drawing on a “Victorian school desk lid” using “cabinet maker’s pearl glue”. A weighted press prevented the vellum from “cockling”. He added some “butterfly braces” to the rear of the panel to enhance its sense of antiquity. He also added torn strips of brown paper around its edges.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://content.met.police.uk/News/Art-forgery-event-at-V-andAmuseum/1260267490421/1257246745756>

<sup>15</sup> *A Forger’s Tale*, ZCZ Editions, London, 2015. A I am grateful to Waldemar Januszczak for sending me a copy of the book.

<sup>16</sup> Josh Boswell, “It’s not a da Vinci, it’s Sally from the Co-op”, *The Sunday Times*, 29 November,

<sup>18</sup> , p.13: [http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk\\_news/Arts/article1639169.ece](http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/news/uk_news/Arts/article1639169.ece)



*Fig.3. Rear of the Panel of La Bella Principessa*

The result was sold (without an attribution) to a dealer in Harrogate in Yorkshire in late 1978. Greenhalgh disclaims responsibility for the “later restoration” and the stitch holes on the left margin. He says nothing about the later butterfly joints in lighter wood.

The story is high on entertainment value, not least because it satisfies the public taste for “experts” and the “art world elite” being made to look ridiculous, but it is low on credibility. His more detailed account of the drawing’s making is an embroidered version of the technical examinations published in the English edition of the book by Kemp and Cotte. Greenhalgh could also have seen the recreation of the portrait by Sarah Simblett for the television programmes. His account picks up none of the additional information in the Italian edition. Although he claims to have used pigments consistent with the period, it is difficult to see how the Pavia dating of the

white lead pigment to over 250 years old can be circumvented. We can also observe that the French custom's stamp that runs over the brown paper border on the back is certainly a lot older than 1978.

We are asked to believe that a self-taught seventeen-year-old knew more than even Leonardo specialists at that time. Awareness of the specifics of the "typical Milanese court dress of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century", including the elaborate hairstyle, is the product of comparatively recent scholarship.<sup>17</sup> We are asked to believe that this teenager was capable of such refined penwork and chalk drawing, when his own drawings suggest no such elevated skill. Greenhalgh's own Renaissance-style drawing opposite page 249 in his book is based on a Verrocchio relief of Alexander in the National Gallery, Washington, with some likely input from Leonardo's silverpoint drawing of the *Bust of a Warrior* in the British Museum. Greenhalgh's drawing has some light-weight decorative charm but nowhere suggests that he could achieve the tautly descriptive line and subtly blended modelling in the drawing on vellum. Leonardo's use of the side of the palm of his hand to soften flesh tones, as disclosed by the multispectral scanning, was not recognised as a common technique in his work as early as 1978. All this is when Greenhalgh was avowedly setting out to make something that was "Not particularly a 'Leonardo'".

Even if he had meticulously researched unknown aspects of Leonardo and the Milanese court in his teenage years, the forgery is astonishingly accomplished, prescient and technically brilliant – far beyond anything I have seen amongst deliberate Leonardo forgeries.

The biggest of all the problems is the date. So that the drawing had time, following its sale by the unknown Harrogate dealer, to enter the Geneva collection of Marchig (who died in 1983), its date of creation needs to be pushed improbably early in Greenhalgh's career. If as Jeanne Marchig insisted, Giannino already owned the work when he moved from Florence to Switzerland in 1949, Greenhalgh can obviously be ruled out.

In a highly amusing way, Greenhalgh the forger has forged his story of his forgery. The silly season for Leonardo never closes.

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<sup>17</sup> See for instance, E. Welch: "Art of the Edge: Hair, Hats and Hands in Renaissance Italy", *Renaissance Studies*, xxii, 2008, pp. 1–29