
Opening Extract from...

Joanna

The Notorious Queen of Naples, Jerusalem and Sicily

Written by Nancy Goldstone

Published by Phoenix

JOANNA

The Notorious Queen *of* Naples,
Jerusalem *and* Sicily

NANCY GOLDSTONE

Phoenix

For my parents

A PHOENIX PAPERBACK

First published in Great Britain in 2010
by Weidenfeld & Nicolson
This paperback edition published in 2011
by Phoenix,
an imprint of Orion Books Ltd,
Orion House, 5 Upper St Martin's Lane,
London WC2H 9EA

An Hachette UK company

This edition published by arrangement with
Walker Publishing Company, Inc,. New York

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Maps by Jeffrey L. Ward

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-7538-2684-3

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI, Mackays

The Orion Publishing Group's policy is to use papers that are natural, renewable and recyclable products and made from wood grown in sustainable forests. The logging and manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

www.orionbooks.co.uk

CHAPTER I

The Kingdom *of* Naples

This city [Naples] . . . is joyful, peaceful, rich, magnificent, and under a single ruler; and these are qualities (if I know you at all well) which are very pleasing to you.

Giovanni Boccaccio
The Elegy of Lady Fiammetta, 1344

Joanna I was born in 1326, eldest child of the heir to the Angevin kingdom of Naples, the largest and most prestigious sovereign entity in Italy. At its northernmost point, the realm jutted up past the great forests of Abruzzi and into the central mountain range of the Appenines. Its long eastern shore boasted an enviable number of ports, including Vieste and Brindisi, from which fast boats ran cargo, passengers, and armies across the Adriatic as a first stop toward such distant destinations as Hungary and wealthy, exotic Byzantium. At its western toe the important duchy of Calabria, on the Mediterranean, offered quick access to the lucrative trading posts on the island of Sicily. The kingdom took its name from its capital city of Naples, which housed the royal court, but this was a relatively recent designation. In 1266, when Joanna's great-great-grandfather Charles of Anjou (from whence the name Angevin derived) first established the family's claim to sovereignty by wresting the realm away from its former ruler, the domain had included the island of Sicily, and for this reason had originally been called the kingdom of Sicily. But in 1282, in an incident famously known as "The Sicilian Vespers" for having occurred at Easter, the people of Sicily rebelled against Charles's harshly autocratic rule and instead invited the king of

Aragon to reign in his place. Charles of Anjou's descendants never accepted this diminution of their authority, however, and strove mightily to retake the island through both military and diplomatic means. As a result, during Joanna's lifetime, the kingdom of Naples was still known, variously and confusingly, as the kingdom of Sicily, or, sometimes, as the kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

Charles of Anjou, a man of little scruple and great ambition, was venerated as the founding patriarch of Joanna's family, and his legacy and vision informed its every movement in the century after his death in 1285. He was the youngest brother of Louis IX, king of France, later Saint Louis. As a member of the French royal family, Charles had the opportunity to make an extremely fortuitous marriage. Joanna's great-great-grandmother was Beatrice, countess of Provence, the youngest of a family of four sisters famous in their day for having all become queens. Charles then used his wife's aid and resources to conquer his Italian realm so that thereafter the kingdom of Naples and the county of Provence were inextricably linked. Joanna was therefore destined at birth to inherit the prestigious title "countess of Provence" and to rule over this strategically important region as well.

Most men would have been content with administering these two domains, but Charles was fueled by the need to become more respected and powerful than his older brother Louis IX, in whose shadow he had lived the majority of his life. Supremely confident of his abilities, Charles dreamed of an empire that would rival that of the kingdom of France. Conveniently, one seemed to be available—the Byzantine Empire to the east, which incorporated the storied city of Constantinople, had been weakened by a series of incompetent rulers. Charles moved quickly to transform aspiration into reality. In May of 1267 he contracted to acquire the legal right to the principia of Achaia, on the western coast of Greece, as a stepping-stone toward invasion. Although he did not realize this ambition during his lifetime, he never relinquished his goal, and the

scale of his desire may be measured by his subsequent purchase, on March 18, 1277, of the title to the kingdom of Jerusalem, an honor for which he paid a thousand pounds of gold outright and an additional stipend of four thousand *livres tournois* annually. Charles was not a man to pay good money for an empty title; he believed himself or his descendants capable of capitalizing on this opportunity. Henceforth, all the Angevin sovereigns of Naples, including Joanna, were therefore also styled king (or queen) of Jerusalem, a durable reminder of their benefactor's expectations.

Dreams of empire aside, the southern Italian kingdom conquered by Joanna's great-great-grandfather was a place of profound physical beauty. A land of spectacular white cliffs and mysterious sea caves, of inviting beaches, fertile plains, and ancient forests, Naples was universally acclaimed for its scenery. A sixteenth-century notary referred to it as "an earthly paradise" in an official government report. The kingdom was also famous as the home of the baths of Baia, the most fashionable spa on the continent, a vacation spot that traced its celebrity back to the giddy days of Julius Caesar and the Roman Empire. "My lady, as you know, just the other side of Mount Falerno . . . lies the rocky coast of Baia high above the seashore, and no sight under the sun is more beautiful or more pleasant than this," wrote Giovanni Boccaccio, a brilliant author and haunting storyteller from the period who knew Naples well. "It is surrounded by the most lovely mountains thick with trees and vineyards; in the valleys any game that can be hunted is available; . . . and for amusements, not far away . . . are the oracles of the Cumaean Sibyl . . . and the amphitheater where the ancient games convened." Even Francesco Petrarch, the most important scholar of the fourteenth century, and a man who ordinarily scorned the pursuit of frivolous pleasure, was impressed by Baia.* "I saw Baia . . . and do

* It was Petrarch who labeled the papal residency at Avignon, known for its profligacy, with the withering sobriquet "The Babylonian Captivity," an unusually apt turn of phrase that stuck through the ages.

not recall a happier day in my life," he wrote to his friend Cardinal Giovanni Colonna in a letter dated November 23, 1345. "I saw . . . everywhere mountains full of perforations and suspended on marble vaults gleaming with brilliant whiteness, and sculpted figures indicating with pointing hands what water is most appropriate for each part of the body. The appearance of the place and the labor devoted to its development caused me to marvel."

But for all its natural beauty, the chief allure of Naples was the royal court, which supported a thriving metropolis. The many and varied personages traditionally drawn by the glow of princely wealth—solicitors and supplicants, ambassadors and architects, financiers, silk merchants, poets and pickpockets—gravitated to the capital city, swelling the number of its inhabitants to capacity. In 1326, the year of Joanna's birth, only four cities in Europe could claim a population of one hundred thousand: Paris, Venice, Milan—and Naples. London, by contrast, was home to only about sixty thousand people.

Although Venice and Milan, and even Florence, with a population of eighty thousand, might rival Naples in terms of size, they could not match it in distinction, for Naples was the only kingdom in Italy. This meant that, among the various heads of state, only Joanna's family hailed from royalty, and in the lineage-conscious fourteenth century, this made a very great difference indeed. Venice, with its monopoly on shipping lanes, was stronger economically, but it was administered by a large council, some of whose members were not even noble. Florence might be the acknowledged seat of European banking, but it was governed by an ever-changing group of middle-class burghers. The self-styled lords of Milan, the Visconti family, were members of the minor provincial nobility, ruthless parvenus who tried to buy their way to social and political legitimacy. Milan wouldn't even become a duchy until the very end of the century.

Joanna's ancestral credentials, on the other hand, were impeccable.

Her father was Charles, duke of Calabria, only son and heir of her grandfather, Robert, king of Naples, by his first wife, Violante. Violante had been a princess of the house of Aragon before her marriage. Joanna's mother was the exceedingly lovely Marie of Valois, daughter of the powerful Charles III of Valois, a younger son of the crown of France. On her father's side, Joanna's French ancestry was even more impressive: she was directly related, through Charles of Anjou, to Louis IX, the most revered king in living memory. Louis had been canonized in 1298, but he was not the only saint in the family. Joanna's great uncle Louis of Toulouse had also been beatified, and she was distantly related to the famous thirteenth-century Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. Even her father's tutor, Elzear, count of Ariano, would eventually be sainted. The blood of great men and women flowed through Joanna's veins, of kings and queens crowned by representatives of the pope and thereby invested with the heavy authority of the church. Hers was a legacy of stirring deeds, courage in battle, wisdom in ruling, piety, chivalry, and honor, the very best that the medieval world had to offer.

Almost from the moment she drew breath, Joanna was fated to be the victim, through her father and grandfather, of the unremitting capriciousness that constituted the politics of Europe, and especially of Italy, in the fourteenth century.

Italy existed only as a geographic designation, not as a political entity, in the Middle Ages. What we recognize today as the country of Italy was simply a string of independent, warring cities, anchored to the south by the Papal States and the kingdom of Naples. As a result, an individual living during Joanna's lifetime would not have considered himself or herself to be an Italian, but, rather, a Florentine or a Venetian, a Pisan or a Roman.

The exception to this rule was a small intellectual circle of which

Francesco Petrarch was the undoubted focal point. Petrarch, who devoted his life to recapturing the lost knowledge of the ancients, was enamored of the idea of a united Italy under the rule of a wise, benevolent emperor as a first step toward reinstituting the greatness of the Roman Empire. Actually, there was an emperor in Europe, the Holy Roman Emperor, but he lived in Germany, which was all that remained of Julius Caesar's vast dominions by the fourteenth century. The German emperor did have a great number of supporters among the people of Italy, who saw his influence as a counterweight to that of the church. This did not mean that those who upheld the emperor's authority were not religious, only that they did not want their particular town or city to become a fief of the papacy, which required conforming to whatever the pope mandated, like paying more money to the church or allowing one of his legates to adjudicate litigation. It was a secular, political issue, not a spiritual one. Members of the faction who favored the emperor were called Ghibellines. For the most part, the Holy Roman Emperor was so well-occupied by German affairs that he had neither the time nor the inclination to raise an army and venture into Italy in order to unify it benevolently or otherwise (although occasionally this did occur). In his absence, the Ghibellines functioned as the medieval equivalent of a modern-day political party, concerned with all the aspects of governing, from potholes to tax statutes.

Challenging the Ghibellines for local control of the major cities and towns in Italy was the other national political party, the Guelph, or papal party. Like the Ghibellines, Guelph supporters were in every part of Italy, although they were stronger in the south (closer to Rome) just as the Ghibellines were stronger in the north (closer to Germany). Assigning too much ideological emphasis to these designations would be a mistake, however. Party loyalties were often corrupted by petty personal concerns. If a Guelph businessman cheated his partner, then the aggrieved party might take his revenge by transferring his loyalty to the Ghibellines. Similarly, if a young

Ghibelline woman chose one lover over another, the spurned suitor and his family might become Guelphs. The concept of sharing local political authority between factions did not exist in the fourteenth century. When a division of the Guelph party, known as the "Black" Guelphs, seized control of Florence in 1301, for example, its members secured their victory by exiling all their political opponents (known as the "White" Guelphs) and appropriating their property. This, naturally enough, infuriated the Whites, who went over to the side of the emperor, and from their new homes in cities with sympathetic Ghibelline governments, they plotted the overthrow of the Black Guelphs.

As though conditions were not volatile enough, the power struggle for control of Italy was further exacerbated by the removal of the papal court to Avignon in 1305. This abandonment was unprecedented in church history. Except for the east-west schism created by Constantine a millennium before, and some temporary absences, a pope had resided in Italy since the days of Saint Peter. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, however, the papal court, which had heretofore withstood the fall of Rome, the invasion of Attila the Hun, the alien barbarity of the Goths, the advent of Charlemagne, and the abject humiliation of several of its pontiffs at the hands of the powerful German emperors, took fright at the hostility evidenced by its own unruly subjects and fled. The last pope to try to live in Italy had been Boniface VIII, who had run afoul of both the French king and the powerful Colonna family of Rome. Boniface was very nearly murdered in his own castle at Anagni. Although saved by supporters at the last minute, Boniface never again acted independently and died a broken man in 1303. This treatment had rather discouraged Boniface's successors, who were all closely allied with the French anyway, from taking the risk of setting up residence in the city of which they were, at least nominally, the bishop. Avignon, conveniently situated on the Rhône, with its pleasant climate, docile population,

and excellent wines, seemed a much more attractive option.

However, just because the pope was no longer in Rome did not mean that he did not wish to control Italy. In the Middle Ages, popes did not limit their activities to matters of religion and the spirit. They considered themselves princes in the fullest sense of the term, and aspired to own and administer a large domain, maintain fiefdoms, acquire new provinces to increase their secular power, and raise the armies necessary to achieve these goals, exactly as would a king of France or England. Managing Guelph affairs from faraway Provence was unwieldy but not unworkable; the pope simply used surrogates. Often he sent ambassadors or papal legates to coax or bully local legislators into carrying out his instructions. But he also relied heavily on his most important vassal to shepherd Guelph interests in the region: the king of Naples.

Naples had been a fief of the church ever since Charles of Anjou had conquered the kingdom using papal funds and encouragement. By a contract dated November 1265, Charles had agreed to pay the pope eight thousand ounces of gold annually (later reduced to seven thousand) plus one white horse every three years in exchange for the privilege of ruling the realm. Moreover, also by virtue of this remarkable document, Charles had maintained the right to pass on the kingdom to his heirs, provided that they, too, kept to the terms of the agreement and did homage to the pope. As a result of this arrangement, unique in Christendom, over time cooperation between Naples and the papacy had deepened to the point where it approached the status of a partnership. The rest of Italy was of course aware of the Angevins' special relationship with the pope, and that was why, when Guelph Florence was threatened by Ghibelline interests in 1326, the Florentines turned for help to the son of the king of Naples, Joanna's father, Charles, duke of Calabria.

Charles of Calabria was twenty-eight years old and already a seasoned warrior when he accepted the Florentines' offer of two hundred thousand gold florins and unilateral control of their government in exchange for defending the city against the hostile advances of Castruccio Castracani, the Ghibelline lord of neighboring Lucca. Charles was the obvious choice; his father, King Robert, was aging and Charles seemed well suited to the military. As a teenager he had demonstrated such high spirits that his father had felt the need to employ a tutor, the saintly Elzear, to moderate his son's behavior, but by his early twenties Charles was sufficiently responsible to come into his inheritance and be named duke of Calabria. In 1322 his father entrusted him with the difficult task of dislodging the entrenched Aragonese ruler of Sicily and returning the island to Neapolitan rule, an undertaking King Robert himself had tried and failed many times during his long career. Charles was no more successful than the king at achieving this goal, but he evidently acquitted himself with honor on the battlefield, and his reputation as an able military commander was firmly established.

King Robert adored Charles, his only legitimate child, and had high expectations for him. Charles's first marriage was to the daughter of the Holy Roman Emperor. When she died prematurely and childless in 1323, Charles's father quickly arranged for his engagement to Marie of Valois, and even sent Elzear to France to ensure that this prestigious alliance with the French royal family came to fruition. Elzear died in Paris but not before accomplishing his mission, and fifteen-year-old Marie married twenty-six-year-old Charles the following year.

Charles was clearly aware of his father's regard and had no trouble speaking his mind to his parent. The acclaimed nineteenth-century Italian scholar Matteo Camera recounted the story of how, when the great convent of Santa Chiara, a highly ambitious project that was initiated in 1310 at the beginning of Robert's reign and took more than twenty years to build, was almost completed, the king

took his son for a tour of the new facility. "Robert . . . asked him how he liked the sacred temple. To this question Charles replied that the great nave made it seem like a stable and the side chapels were like so many horse-stalls. Robert . . . replied, 'May it please God, my son, that you not be the first to feed in this stable!'"

The duke of Calabria rode into Florence on July 30, 1326, accompanied by his new young wife, Marie, assorted members of the royal court, and a large army—"a thousand horse," according to Niccolo Machiavelli, who wrote about the incident two centuries later in his *History of Florence*. Charles's administration seems to have received mixed reviews. Although Machiavelli admitted that "his army prevented further pillage of the Florentine territory by Castruccio," the scribe claimed that the Florentines chafed under the rule of their new master because "the Signory [the city elders] could not do anything without the consent of the duke of Calabria, who . . . drew from the people 400,000 florins, although by the agreement entered into with him, the sum was not to exceed 200,000." However, the Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani, a contemporary of Charles's, presented a much more positive view of his regime. Although conceding the 400,000 florin figure, Villani asserted that this sum was more than offset by the increase in business associated with the transference of the royal court, which attracted large numbers of well-heeled aristocrats.

Certainly, the arrival of the duke and duchess and their many attendants, all of whom were young and sociable and used to spending significant sums of money on gifts and clothes and lavish entertainments, was a novelty in merchant-oriented Florence. (To ensure that the royal party was sufficiently provisioned during its stay in the Florentine palace assigned to their use, six thousand sheep, three thousand pigs, and two thousand calves had been sent on ahead in March.) The Florentine patriarchs, who had clawed their way to power through business acumen, were used to saving and reinvesting their money. They frowned on careless expenditure, especially on

fripperies, and had gone so far as to pass strict sumptuary laws forbidding the wearing of certain expensive articles of dress, a stratagem they managed to maintain until their wives caught a glimpse of their new duchess and the chic fashions of Naples. Marie soon proved herself an asset to her husband's government by embracing her female subjects' perspective and defending their right to wear what they could afford, a progressive stance that won the hearts of the Florentine gentlewomen. "In the year 1326, in the month of December, the duke of Calabria, at the petition which the ladies of Florence made to the duchess his wife, restored to the said ladies a certain unbecoming and disreputable ornament of thick tresses of white and yellow silk which they wore about their faces instead of their hair, which ornament, because displeasing to the Florentine men . . . they had forbidden to the ladies, and made laws against this and other unreasonable ornaments," wrote a disapproving Villani.

Joanna's birth, which occurred some time during the first half of 1326, coincided with her father's Florentine commission. The date was not recorded, but the chronicler Donato Acciaiuoli stated that she was born in Florence; possibly he meant en route. Her older sister, Louise, born the year before, had died that January, so Joanna's birth would have greatly cheered her mother. In April 1327, Marie gave birth to her third child, a son, Charles Martel, to great rejoicing, but he lived only eight days, so Joanna remained her father's heir. According to Villani, when the couple returned to Naples in 1328, the duke of Calabria had "two female children, one born, and another of which the duchess was pregnant" (Marie's fourth child, Joanna's younger sister, Maria, born in 1329), again indicating that Joanna was with her parents during their sojourn in Florence.

The duke and duchess's stay in Florence was cut off by the ominous prospect of imperial invasion. The Ghibellines, worried that the duke of Calabria's presence signaled a new offensive on the part of the Guelphs, appealed to the emperor for support, and this time, unexpectedly, he answered their summons.

The emperor, Louis of Bavaria, had been plagued from the start of his reign by an extended quarrel with the papacy. Custom dictated that, in order to be recognized as Holy Roman Emperor, a candidate first had to be elected king of the Romans, which was the title the Germans gave to their monarch (yet another holdover from the days of Caesar), and then crowned emperor in Rome by the pope or one of his representatives. But Louis took the title king of the Romans by force after his election was disputed by an opposition candidate who had won an equal number of votes. This action provoked the ire of Pope John XXII, who claimed the right to mediate, and who further argued that nobody could be emperor without his approval. Just to make certain that his position on this matter was absolutely clear, the pope excommunicated Louis and placed all his constituents under interdict.

Louis still hungered for an imperial coronation, however, so when his Ghibelline supporters in Italy begged him to raise an army to come to their defense, he decided to use this occasion to get himself crowned in Rome, pope or no pope. Additionally, to punish King Robert for sending his son to Florence and upsetting the balance of power in the region, and to further needle his papal antagonist by adding Guelph territory to his dominions, Louis decided to attack the kingdom of Naples. To this end, he made an alliance with the Neapolitans' most feared enemy, Frederick III of Aragon, king of Sicily. Their plan was to encircle and then invade Naples, Louis with the imperial army from the north by land, and Frederick with his Sicilian forces from the west, by sea.

The Neapolitans knew their proximity to hostile Sicily made them vulnerable to a two-front war and had long dreaded precisely this type of assault. Robert in Naples and Charles in Florence carefully followed Louis' progress through Italy. Understanding that his primary target was Naples, many northern Italian towns were happy to pay Louis a tribute to leave them alone. The Ghibelline cities of Milan, Verona, Ferrara, and Mantua threw open their gates to the

emperor, and their leaders were rewarded with imperial titles. The Florentines' bitter enemy, Castruccio Castracani, who had started all the trouble in the first place, was elevated to duke of Lucca by allying himself with the emperor and helping his forces to take Pisa away from the Guelphs. In January 1328, Louis triumphantly entered Rome, where he satisfied his ambition by being crowned Holy Roman Emperor by one of his supporters. "In this manner was Louis the Bavarian crowned Emperor by the people of Rome, to the great disgrace and offence of the Pope and the Holy Church," wrote Giovanni Villani in his chronicle. "What presumption in the accursed Bavarian! Nowhere in history do we find that an Emperor, however hostile to the Pope he may have been before, or may afterwards have become, ever allowed himself to be crowned by anyone but the Pope or his legates, with the single exception of this Bavarian; and the fact excited great astonishment."

At this point Robert judged the situation sufficiently dire to recall Charles home to prepare for the expected invasion. The duke of Calabria, together with his pregnant wife and two-year-old daughter and all their court, rode out of Florence, leaving the city under the protection of a viceroy and a standing army of a hundred thousand soldiers, and headed grimly for Naples, resigned to war.

But as so often happened in the Middle Ages, a mixture of politics, vanity, and accident intervened. The pope, hearing of Louis' Roman coronation, repaid the insult by issuing a bull from Avignon deposing him as emperor. In retaliation, Louis signed a proclamation deposing the pope and set up a new one of his own choosing in Rome. Then, instead of marching out of the city to join forces with the Sicilians, Louis, perhaps responding to the criticism voiced by Villani, stayed in Rome in order to organize a second coronation for himself, this time by his puppet pope. The festivities surrounding this second coronation so depleted the emperor's financial resources that he was no longer able to pay his army, and so, when the citizens of Rome finally rebelled against him in August 1328,

he was forced to retreat to Germany. His pope fled to Pisa before falling into enemy hands and spent his remaining days in captivity in France. Ghibelline prospects in the region were further damaged by the sudden death of Castruccio and by the failure of the Sicilians to organize an offensive in time to coordinate with imperial forces. By 1330, Naples was no longer threatened, Rome had once again consented to the absentee leadership of the pope in Avignon, and everything was as it had been before. The Florentine elders even reinstated the sumptuary laws.

The ignominious retreat of the emperor would have been regarded as an unqualified triumph for the Neapolitans had it not been marred by tragedy: the premature death of the duke of Calabria upon his return to Naples. Joanna's father died on November 9, 1328, not of an ambush by enemies in the rushed journey home, nor of a wound or fall sustained in preparing for war, but of a fever contracted from overexerting himself in the heat at his favorite sport, falconry. The crown prince was laid to rest in a tomb at the church of Santa Chiara in one of the "horse stalls" he had earlier ridiculed. To his father's great grief—"The crown has fallen from my head," Robert is reputed to have mourned—the witty rejoinder Robert had made to his son had come to pass, or perhaps the chroniclers, as sometimes happened, supplied this prophetic response after the fact.

When their mother, Marie of Valois, died three years later and was laid to rest in yet another of the stalls of Santa Chiara, Joanna and her younger sister, Maria, found themselves orphaned. As a result, the children were brought up at the magnificent court of their paternal grandfather, Robert, king of Naples, and his second wife, Sancia of Majorca.