

# A newly discovered cabinet miniature by Nicholas Hilliard

The publication here for the first time of an important miniature by Hilliard in a private collection adds significantly to our understanding of his practice and patronage. His only known completed cabinet miniature of a female subject, it can be identified as a portrait of Lady Arbella Stuart and its commission connected with a fascinating episode of spycraft in late Elizabethan England.

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**N**ICHOLAS HILLIARD'S PRODUCTION of cabinet miniatures spans a roughly ten-year period, from c.1585 to c.1595.<sup>1</sup> Too big to be held in the palm of the hand, these works were designed not for insertion in bejeweled lockets, but rather for display in cases or cabinets or occasionally hung on a wall. The sitters are depicted full length, often in an outdoor setting, and are surrounded by objects more typically associated with oil paintings 'in great'. Fewer than ten examples – two of them left unfinished by Hilliard (c.1547–1619) – are known to survive. To this list can now be added a hitherto unknown and unpublished cabinet miniature by the artist, which has recently come to light in a private collection (Fig.1). Executed on a sheet of vellum, the dimensions of which are 21.1 by 17.6 centimetres, the work is in excellent condition, with remarkably vivid colours.<sup>2</sup> In addition to increasing the number of known Hilliard cabinet miniatures, this work is (so far as is known) the only extant example by him of a completed cabinet miniature of a female sitter. It is not signed – only a few of Hilliard's works are – but its style and the materials and techniques deployed leave no doubt as to its authenticity.

As is often the case with Hilliard's portraits, the identity of the subject of this impressive miniature, clearly a lady of great wealth and extremely high status, has to be inferred. So close are the parallels with Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger's life-size Ditchley Portrait of Elizabeth I commissioned by Henry Lee c.1592 (Fig.2) and Hilliard's own 'mask of youth' miniatures (Fig.3) produced at the queen's behest from c.1592 onwards, that at a glance Hilliard's subject easily could be mistaken for Elizabeth herself. However, several visual, documentary and circumstantial elements point to the sitter being Lady Arbella (or Arabella) Stuart (1575–1615), as portrayed

Opposite

**1. A lady, here identified as Lady Arbella Stuart, by Nicholas Hilliard. 1592. Watercolour and bodycolour on vellum, stuck down on card, 21.1 by 17.6 cm. (Private collection).**

in 1592 at the age of sixteen and a half. The granddaughter and ward of Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury ('Bess of Hardwick'; 1527–1608) – the second richest woman in late Elizabethan England after the queen – Arbella was, via her paternal grandmother Lady Margaret Douglas, a direct descendant of Henry VII.<sup>3</sup> She was, therefore, a kinswoman of the childless and ageing Elizabeth I and, as a Protestant with a compelling claim to the throne, acknowledged as one of a handful of viable successors.

Hilliard has depicted his subject standing in a formal garden on a sunny day, an imposing dark-red brick building, the corners with stone quoins, partially visible behind her. A dug path or trench runs through the garden immediately behind where she stands. To her left is a low hedge with a white rambling rose and to her right is a young tree with open white flowers and small black fruits: a stylised and allegorical image of fertility and fruitfulness rather than a literal depiction of an identifiable species of tree.<sup>4</sup> In her left hand the sitter holds a floral wreath, which appears to be made of roses, rosehips, blue viola pansies and blue borage (Fig.4).<sup>5</sup> Additional flowers are pinned to her bodice.

The sitter wears court dress, the most formal style of English dress in the late sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup> But this is an exceptionally lavish, quasi-regal version of such dress, rendered in painstaking detail by Hilliard's brush. The gown's bodice and petticoat are made of a white silk-satin decorated (probably embroidered) with gold stars. The sleeves, stomacher and border at the hem of the petticoat are of white silk, with a decorative structure –

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<sup>1</sup> See E. Goldring: *Nicholas Hilliard: Life of an Artist*, New Haven and London 2019, pp.227–34.

<sup>2</sup> That said, the water-based pigments inevitably have faded slightly in places through exposure to light while the silver used to depict the

sitter's jewels, together with some aspects of her dress, has oxidised to black over time.

<sup>3</sup> Born around 10th November 1575, Arbella was the only child of Charles Stuart, 1st Earl of Lennox of the third creation (1557–76), and Elizabeth Cavendish (1555–82). Her father died when she was still an infant, her mother when she was seven years old. Through her father, Arbella was a great-

great-granddaughter of Henry VII.

<sup>4</sup> The authors are grateful to Ursula Buchan and Ian Tyers for assistance with the flora depicted in this cabinet miniature.

<sup>5</sup> Again, Hilliard has exercised a certain artistic licence, with flowers from multiple seasons represented in the same wreath.

<sup>6</sup> The authors are grateful to Susan North for assistance with the sitter's costume.







A cabinet miniature by Nicholas Hilliard







Opposite

2. *Elizabeth I* (the Ditchley Portrait), by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger. c.1592. Oil on canvas, 241.3 by 152.4 cm. (National Portrait Gallery, London).

3. *Elizabeth I* (an example of the 'mask of youth'), by Nicholas Hilliard. c.1592–1603. Watercolour on vellum, 6.5 by 5.3 cm. (Victoria & Albert Museum, London).

4. Detail of Fig.1, showing the floral wreath.

5. Detail of Fig.1, showing the gold armillary spheres decorating the gown.

possibly damask or brocade – woven with silver thread and embroidered with silver spangles and gold armillary spheres, a personal symbol of Elizabeth I (Fig.5).<sup>7</sup> It is unclear whether the large, central silver star seen on the stomacher was embroidered on the gown or a jewel. If it is the latter, it might conceivably correspond to the 'jewel like a star, set with opals' recorded in Arbella's possession prior to 1611.<sup>8</sup> An under-petticoat edged with a gold fringe can be seen beneath the gown's hem, as can the toes of a pair of white silk shoes embroidered with silver. The cuffs and a large open ruff are of Italian cutwork edged with needle lace.

The headpiece comprises false hair studded with pearls and a large silver star jewel set with a central ruby and topped with feathers. Standing proud towards the back of the sitter's head are wired pearls and puffs of fabric made from white cobweb lawn, which is a very fine, diaphanous material. The long, wide, lace-trimmed veil is also made of cobweb lawn, weighted with pearls at the lower corners, one of which appears to rest delicately in the gown's folds. Looped around the sitter's neck and waist are several chains of gold, set with rubies, pearls and table-cut diamonds. Pearl bracelets can be seen on both wrists, and a gold ring set with a pointed diamond (similar to one identified by Arbella as missing in 1611) is visible on the sitter's left thumb.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Armillary spheres appear in numerous paintings of Elizabeth I from the mid-1570s onwards, including the Reading Portrait of 1575 and the Ditchley Portrait of c.1592, where the earring in the Queen's left ear is an armillary sphere (Fig.2). See J. Wilson: 'Queen Elizabeth I as Urania', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 69 (2006), pp.151–73; and R. Strong: *Gloriana: The Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I*, London 2003, pp.139–41.

<sup>8</sup> This jewel was one of several identified by Arbella in 1611 as missing, see E.T. Bradley: *Life of the Lady*

*Arabella Stuart*, London 1889, II, p.272 (citing British Library, London, Harleian MS 7003, fol.141).

<sup>9</sup> For the 'poignard diamond ring', see *ibid.*, p.271.

<sup>10</sup> Bess's meteoric rise – aided by four marriages, each to a richer and more socially exalted man – has long since passed into legend. See E. Goldring: 'Talbot [nee Hardwick], Elizabeth [Bess] [called Bess of Hardwick], countess of Shrewsbury (1527?–1608)', in H.C.G. Matthew and B. Harrison, eds: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford 2004; www.oxford.dnb.com.

Like Hilliard's other surviving cabinet miniatures, this example is not inscribed with a date. However, details such as the sitter's open ruff, low-cut bodice and wide farthingale (its edge decoratively pinned to the petticoat) point to the work being created sometime during the 1590s. So, too, do the silhouettes of her sleeves (full at the shoulder and tapered to the wrist) and bodice (pointed and extending below the natural waistline). Unmistakable echoes of both the Ditchley Portrait and Hilliard's 'mask of youth' miniatures narrow the probable window for the execution of this cabinet miniature to the early 1590s; they also reinforce the likelihood of the sitter being Arbella. It is difficult to imagine who at the late Elizabethan court – other than Arbella, guided by the socially ambitious Bess – would have dared to draw such a palpable association between herself and the queen.<sup>10</sup>

No contemporary descriptions of Arbella's appearance are known to survive, save for vague statements such as the French ambassador's observation, after seeing her at court in 1587, that she was 'sufficiently handsome in the face'.<sup>11</sup> Nor are there any certain images of her. Two oil paintings at Hardwick New Hall, Derbyshire – the prodigy house that Bess







6. A girl, said to depict Lady Arbella Stuart at the age of twenty-three months, by an unknown artist. ?1577. Oil on panel transferred to canvas, 75.1 by 61.5 cm. (National Trust; Hardwick New Hall, Derbyshire).

built in the 1590s – have long been thought to depict Arbella, in one case aged twenty-three months (Fig.6) and in the other aged thirteen.<sup>11</sup> There are no obvious physical differences that would disqualify the sitter in the cabinet miniature from being the subject of all three portraits. Yet that of the toddler Arbella (if it is she) is of limited use in establishing the likely appearance of the adult Arbella, while that said to depict the thirteen-year-old Arbella must be approached with caution on account of its complicated physical history and extensive repainting.<sup>12</sup> That said, a less heavily restored version of the latter, now at Welbeck Abbey, Nottinghamshire, depicts a young lady with colouring and physical features similar to those seen in the cabinet miniature (Fig.7).

11 See R. Strong: *Tudor and Jacobean Portraits*, London 1969, I, p.303.

12 It is often assumed that these oil paintings correspond to the two portraits of Arbella recorded in a 1601 inventory of Bess's possessions at Hardwick, one of which ('the Ladie Arbella') was in the 'Gallery', the other of which ('The Ladie Arbella her grandChilde') was in the 'Low Great Chamber'. In fact, the vague nature of the entries makes it impossible to know if that is correct: as is more often than not the case with picture inventories of this period, no information is provided about medium, size or artist. For a transcription of the inventory, see S.M. Levey, ed.: *Of Household Stuff: The 1601*

*Inventories of Bess of Hardwick*, London 2001, pp.50 and 52.

13 Indeed, the inscribed cartouche in the upper-left corner, which provides the basis for this identification, is now thought (in the light of conservation work undertaken in 1999–2000) to be a later addition rather than an original feature of the painting. The authors are grateful to Jane Eade and Liz Waring for sharing the contents of the National Trust's conservation files with them.

14 Chatsworth HMS/1/8 (hereafter HMS), fol.30r.

15 It long has been accepted that this payment in Bess's accounts refers to a portrait of Arbella, but the image in question has been assumed to be a lost

If the iconography of Hilliard's cabinet miniature develops a case for it being considered a depiction of Arbella in the early 1590s, documentary evidence removes all doubt that it is she who is portrayed and enables the precise date of the commission to be pinpointed. The basis for this assertion lies in Bess's financial accounts: a day-by-day record of expenditures compiled by Rowland Harrison, one of her servants, which Bess reviewed at the end of each week, correcting any errors on Harrison's part. This manuscript, now preserved at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, records that on 27th July 1592 'mr Hilliard' was paid £3 for completing a 'Pictuer': £2, plus a tip of £1.<sup>14</sup> The subject of Hilliard's 'Pictuer' is not specified. But the context and timing indicate that it can only have depicted Arbella. Her portrait – specifically by Hilliard – had been requested repeatedly in late 1591 and early 1592 in connection with her possible dynastic marriage to twenty-two-year-old Ranuccio Farnese (1569–1622), the elder son of Alessandro Farnese, Duke of Parma and Piacenza (1545–92), Philip II's Governor-General in the Spanish Netherlands from 1578.<sup>15</sup>

On the same day that Hilliard was paid, Rowland Lockey (active 1593–1616), who recently had completed his apprenticeship with Hilliard, received £2 (no tip) for 'one other picture', presumably a copy of Hilliard's work.<sup>16</sup> Strike-throughs and marginalia in the accounts – apparently made by Harrison in response to information provided by Bess during her weekly review – suggest that the original plan may have been for Hilliard to execute 'Two Pictuers a greater and a Lesser' and for Lockey to make copies of both. In the end, however, Hilliard seems to have executed one 'greater' picture and Lockey a 'Lesser' one. This distinction – the only known occasion in which the word 'greater' is used in a late sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century source in relation to one of Hilliard's works – traditionally has been explained as a commentary on the relative merits of each picture.<sup>17</sup>

We can reasonably assume that Hilliard's work was more accomplished than his former pupil's. However, as is clear from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the primary meanings of 'great' and 'greater' at this time pertained to physical size: 'greater' was used, first and foremost, to denote something that was larger, not better.<sup>18</sup> When, for example, Abraham van der Doort (d.1640), Keeper of Charles I's art collections, compiled a catalogue of the King's paintings c.1639, he described the *Entombment* – a cabinet miniature started by Isaac Oliver (c.1565–1617) and completed by his son Peter – as 'the greate lim'd peece'. This was chiefly a commentary, it would seem, on the work's size, the *Entombment* having been the largest miniature in Charles I's collection.<sup>19</sup>

It seems most likely that what Harrison recorded in Bess's accounts was a payment to Hilliard for executing a cabinet miniature and a payment to Lockey for making a smaller copy. The relationship between the resulting images of Arbella, in all likelihood, was something akin to that between Hilliard's large cabinet miniature of Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland (Fig.8), and the much smaller oval variant from Hilliard's workshop (Fig.9), both c.1595. In the larger work Percy, shown

head-and-shoulders miniature. See Strong, *op. cit.* (note 11), I, p.303; D. Durant: *Bess of Hardwick: Portrait of an Elizabethan Dynast*, London 1977, pp.170–71; and M. Edmond: *Hilliard and Oliver*, London 1983, pp.114–18. Note, however, that the brief discussion, in each of these works, of the documentary sources relating to requests for a portrait of Arbella in connection with a marriage to Ranuccio is incomplete (and uninformed by recent scholarship on the late Elizabethan spy services).

16 HMS, fol.30r. For Lockey's apprenticeship with Hilliard, see Goldring, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.169, 178, 180–84 and 299, note 36.

17 See, for example, Strong, *op. cit.* (note 11), p.303; and Durant, *op. cit.* (note 15), pp.170–71.

18 See the entry for 'great (adj., n., adv., int.)', in *Oxford English Dictionary*, available at [www.oed.com/dictionary/great\\_adj](http://www.oed.com/dictionary/great_adj), accessed 20th February 2024.

19 O. Millar: 'Abraham van der Doort's catalogue of the collections of Charles I', *The Walpole Society* 37 (1958–60), pp.1–243, at p.103. By the same token, when recording the miniatures of Queen Henrietta Maria displayed in the Cabinet Room at Whitehall Palace – where they were arranged in descending size order – van der Doort systematically described each as 'lessor' than the one before (pp.105–06).

full-length strikes a melancholy recumbent pose on a manicured lawn; the smaller, oval-shaped workshop version depicts only his head and shoulders. It is unclear if Locket's 'Lesser' picture of Arbella survives. But if it does, it is probably an oval, head-and-shoulders miniature like that of Percy – small enough to fit in the palm of one's hand – which copies Hilliard's likeness of Arbella's face.

In addition to confusion over the meaning of 'greater', there is another aspect of this episode, the significance of which has not been previously noted. This is the fact that the payments to Hilliard and Locket were made near the end of an eight-month visit by Bess and Arbella to Greater London, which culminated in an extended stay at Greenwich Palace.<sup>20</sup> There they

7. *A girl, said to depict Lady Arbella Stuart at the age of thirteen, by an unknown artist. ?1589. Oil on panel, 162.6 by 87.6 cm. (National Trust; Hardwick New Hall, Derbyshire).*



made use of the royal gardens on a number of occasions: Bess tipped the Queen's gardeners multiple times in May, June and early July 1592.<sup>21</sup> It seems very reasonable, therefore, to propose that the cabinet miniature under discussion is not just the 'Pictuer' for which Hilliard was paid on 27th July 1592, but actually a depiction of Arbella in one of the formal gardens at Greenwich Palace. For Arbella to have sat for Hilliard outdoors, in a royal garden, would have been particularly apt for an image designed to cast her in the mould of Elizabeth I; this parallels Hilliard's first experience of taking the Queen's likeness, which occurred, at the sitter's request, 'in the open ally of a goodly garden', at Hampton Court in July 1571.<sup>22</sup> Presumably, the wall partially visible in the background of the portrait is Greenwich Palace itself, the Tudor portions of which were constructed primarily of dark-red brick.

In many ways, a cabinet miniature would have been an ideal response to requests from abroad for an image of Arbella to show to the Duke of Parma and his son. It was small enough to be transported with ease over long distances, yet large enough to showcase the entire female form while also proclaiming – through dress, jewellery and setting – Arbella's wealth, rank and potential fecundity. In the end, however, Hilliard's cabinet miniature does not seem to have been dispatched to the Continent, although Locket's copy of a 'Lesser' size may have been sent in its place.

This important commission may be further understood in the context of the ongoing dynastic and confessional conflict focused on the Low Countries, which had the Duke of Parma, a pre-eminent general with a sophisticated and substantial court in Brussels, at its heart. Despite having defeated the Armada in 1588, England remained at war with Philip II's Spain and the queen was threatened – or so many perceived – by a mixture of Catholic succession, invasion and Jesuitical infiltration. English troops were deployed in the Netherlands and France, where they supported Henri of Navarre (1553–1610), who at this time was still a Protestant, against various Catholic forces led by Parma, including troops from Spain, Italy and France.<sup>23</sup> Protestants at the late Elizabethan court considered the Low Countries to be a hotbed of plotting for Catholic exiles such as the Lancashire-born Cardinal William Allen (1532–94), who had helped to plan the Spanish Armada's failed invasion attempt of 1588.

On the English side, the queen's chief political advisor was William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520–98), assisted by his second son, Robert Cecil (1563–1612). Following the death of Francis Walsingham in 1590, the Cecils – together with Thomas Heneage (1532–95) – had assumed control of the Elizabethan spy services. At this time the Cecils were also Hilliard's chief patrons.<sup>24</sup> In the spring or early summer of 1591 the Cecils devised a plan – however unlikely – to deploy their ambitions for Arbella in order to undermine Philip II. Such a diplomatic move would advance the English cause in the war. Hilliard's creation of the newly discovered cabinet miniature, its Arcadian idyll forming a sharp contrast to the grubby world of espionage and counter-espionage, is a tangible result of this political strategy.

<sup>20</sup> Bess and Arbella set off from Hardwick on, or shortly before, 18th November 1591 and reached Bess's house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, on 26th November 1591. They departed 'Chelsie' for the return 'lornye' on 31st July 1592, arriving back at Hardwick on 5th August 1592, see HMS, fols.6r, 6v and 32v. Although for most of this period they were based at the Cheyne Walk house, Bess and Arbella were at Greenwich Palace from 1st May through 21st or 22nd May 1592, and again from 1st June through 20th July 1592, see HMS, fols.22v–24r and 25r–29r.

<sup>21</sup> Tips to the gardeners at Greenwich are recorded in Bess's accounts on 7th May (twice), 13th May, 21st May

(twice), 9th June, 11th June, 18th June, 20th June, 25th June and 2nd July, HMS, fols.23r, 23v, 24r, 26r, 26v, 27r, 27v and 28r.

<sup>22</sup> See N. Hilliard: *The Arte of Limning*, ed. R.K.R. Thornton and T.G.S. Cain, Ashington and Manchester 1992, pp.64–66; and Goldring, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.103–09.

<sup>23</sup> Henri would convert to Catholicism in 1593.

<sup>24</sup> For the Cecils as Hilliard's chief patrons from the late 1580s onwards, see Goldring, *op. cit.* (note 1), pp.181, 203, 216, 238–40, 242, 250–52, 264, 273 and 275. Prior to the late 1580s, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (?1532–88), had been Hilliard's chief patron.



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Both the potential and the risks of a Farnese marriage for Arbella had been discussed at the Elizabethan court since before the Armada; such a union was considered as part of a broader policy aimed at splitting Parma from Spain and Spain from the Netherlands, to the benefit of Protestant England.<sup>25</sup> In 1591, however, its possible religio-political benefits came to the fore: a shift in Parma's allegiance away from Spain at that date might well have decisively tipped the balance of power in the Netherlands and France in England's favour. Whether the Cecils (or Elizabeth I) would have actually sanctioned a match between Arbella and Ranuccio is debatable. However, they certainly were keen, in 1591 and early 1592, to give the appearance of actively promoting it, if only for the purpose of throwing Philip II off balance.

At the heart of the Cecils' plan was the ambiguous figure of Michael Moody, sometime servant to Edward Stafford (1478–1521), who in late 1590 had been released from the Tower of London after nearly four years' imprisonment for his apparent involvement in the Stafford plot to assassinate Elizabeth I.<sup>26</sup> In May 1591 Moody wrote to Burghley offering his services as an intelligencer, promising that he could infiltrate the Catholic community on the Continent better than anyone else. The Cecils duly recruited Moody – apparently in the hope of opening secret communications with Parma – and sent him to Brussels, although they lacked sufficient trust in him so placed several informants on his tail. From the reports filed by one of those assigned to monitor Moody it seems that he remained in Brussels until early August 1591, during which time he successfully integrated himself into the household of Parma's chief intelligencer, the exiled Welsh Catholic Hugh Owen (1538–1618), while doing what he could to encourage a match between Arbella and Ranuccio.<sup>27</sup>

Another such report from one John Ricroft, who tailed Moody from Brussels to London later that same month, reveals that Moody was intent on 'getting the picture of Arbella to carry to the Duke of Parma'.<sup>28</sup> In order to achieve this, Moody was planning an imminent approach 'to Hilliard' (who at that time was living on Gutter Lane, just off Cheapside in London), equipped with a letter of introduction to 'aide him'. Unaware that Moody was working for the Cecils, Ricroft was keen to alert them to what he believed was a nefarious plot by Moody to install Arbella and Ranuccio on the English throne, the clear implication being that the queen would have to be assassinated and the couple, once in power, would be little more than puppets of Philip II.

The content of Ricroft's report to the Cecils is corroborated by the intelligence of the enemy: namely, a dispatch from Cardinal Allen, at Antwerp, to Philip II, in Madrid, dated 11th October 1591. According to Allen, a group of Britons in exile in the Low Countries were hoping:

to conclude a marriage between the son of the Duke of Parma and Lady Arbella [. . .] one, called Moody, not long since, as he himself has told me, went to England to procure a portrait of

<sup>25</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the points summarised in this paragraph, see, for example, P.H. Martin: *Elizabethan Espionage: Plotters and Spies in the Struggle between Catholicism and the Crown*, Jefferson NC 2016, pp.132–34.  
<sup>26</sup> There is some evidence to suggest that Moody may have been acting as agent provocateur and reporting directly to Walsingham, then the head of the Elizabethan spy services. See C. Nicholl: *The Reckoning*, London 1993, pp.164 and 252.  
<sup>27</sup> For the Cecils' complicated relationship with Moody, see, for example, A. Haynes: *The Elizabethan Secret Services*, Stroud 2004, pp.96,

108, 112, 16–62 and 166; C. Mains: 'Sir Robert Cecil and Elizabethan intelligencing, 1590–1603', unpublished PhD thesis (Open University, 2021), pp.55–58, 63, 193 and 241; Martin, *op. cit.* (note 25), pp.101–04 and 134–39; and Nicholl, *op. cit.* (note 26), pp.251–56 and 385. Moody's letter of 18th May 1591 offering his services is National Archives, Kew (hereafter NA), SP 12/238, fol.234r; the anonymous report on his activities at Brussels, dated 8th August 1591, is NA, SP 101/1, fol.173.  
<sup>28</sup> NA, SP 12/239, fol.253. The author of this letter of introduction, identified by Ricroft as 'Mr V', remains uncertain.  
<sup>29</sup> P. Renold, ed.: *Letters of William Allen and Richard Barret, 1572–1598*,

8. *Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland*, by Nicholas Hilliard. c.1595. Watercolour on vellum, 25.7 by 17.3 cm. (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).

9. *Henry Percy, 9th Earl of Northumberland*, by the Hilliard workshop. c.1595. Watercolour on vellum, 5.2 by 6.4 cm. (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge).



Lady Arbella: and in connection with this match the son of the Duke of Parma came from Italy to Flanders.<sup>29</sup>

There can be no doubt that Allen refers to the same August 1591 visit to London described by Riccio: Ranuccio, who normally resided in Italy, had visited the Low Countries that month, during which time father and son took the waters together at Spa, near Brussels.<sup>30</sup> Moody's approach to Hilliard may have been part of a plan agreed with the Cecils or an initiative of Moody's own, prompted by Ranuccio's unexpected visit to the Low Countries. Whichever the case, it was in many ways a shrewd idea. At the time, Hilliard was the only painter at the English court with international name recognition, and the anticipated high quality of Hilliard's portrait would have been a sharply calculated appeal to Parma and his son, both of whom were noted patrons of painters and collectors of paintings.<sup>31</sup>

The Cecils had certainly been kept informed. On 14th October 1591 Moody, now in Vlissingen, wrote to ask for their help acquiring the desired portrait of Arbella by Hilliard: 'I praye you send me her picture, for that there is one verie desirows to se yt'.<sup>32</sup> The reply – if one was sent – does not seem to have survived. However, as is clear from the despatches of another of the Cecils' informants, Moody made two or three additional trips to London between early November 1591 and early April 1592 in an effort both to commission a portrait from Hilliard and 'to practize withe Arbella [. . .] aboute a marriage betwixt the duke of parma his sonne & hir'.<sup>33</sup>

It is unclear what instructions Hilliard, Bess and Arbella received from the Cecils in relation to Moody. But there is reason to believe that, when Bess and Arbella reached Chelsea on 26th November 1591, a message from the Cecils was waiting for them. Bess's accounts record that, on arrival at her house in Cheyne Walk, she tipped 'Sir Robt Cicels footeman' ten shillings.<sup>34</sup> The Cecils' ultimate goal – to unnerv Philip II by creating the illusion of an imminent match between Arbella and Ranuccio – casts new light on the tax-free £400 granted to Hilliard by the queen on 11th December 1591 'in consideracion of [his] good and faythfull service'.<sup>35</sup> This extraordinarily large sum, long known to scholars, is traditionally considered to be compensation for the fact that, over the years, Elizabeth often had been slow to pay for the portraits Hilliard had painted of her. But surely this £400 grant – seemingly administered by Burghley personally – was also intended to reward Hilliard for a recent, and ongoing, display of 'service' in relation to Moody's mission.<sup>36</sup>

The surviving letters to the Cecils from their many informants in the Low Countries make no mention after April 1592 of Moody seeking a portrait of Arbella by Hilliard. Perhaps the fact that Parma was badly wounded in late April by a musket shot during the siege of Caudebec-en-Caux caused all involved to change tack.<sup>37</sup> Ranuccio, who had been in the Low Countries since the previous August – and was present when his father was wounded on 20th April 1592 – returned to Italy immediately, at Parma's insistence in case he, too, might be injured in battle.<sup>38</sup>

Alternatively, it is possible that Moody went quiet on the subject of Arbella's portrait because he succeeded in acquiring one. It seems unlikely that this cabinet miniature, given its near-pristine condition, was dispatched either to Parma in the Low Countries or to Ranuccio in Italy. Perhaps Lockey's copy of a 'Lesser' size was sent abroad in its stead shortly after its completion in late July 1592. Indeed, might the reason for involving Lockey have been to create an image that could be used – almost in the manner of a disposable stage prop – as part of the Cecils' plan to unsettle Philip II? Moody's attempts to acquire a portrait of Arbella by Hilliard, together with the Cecils' efforts to give the appearance of supporting a match between her and Ranuccio, seem to have planted the seed of an idea in Bess's mind: that her granddaughter should be portrayed by the most celebrated English portraitist of the day in a manner that would convey her status as a queen-in-waiting to any future (more viable) suitors. Given that Hilliard's involvement in this commission appears to have been heavily subsidised by the Crown, the £3 he received from Bess probably ought to be thought of as a token sum rather than an indication of his usual fee for an *ad vivum* cabinet miniature.

The emergence of this hitherto unknown cabinet miniature – and the identification of its sitter as Arbella, as portrayed by Hilliard in a garden at Greenwich Palace in the summer of 1592 – is significant for several reasons. As well as being the only extant cabinet miniature by Hilliard of a female subject, it constitutes the most reliable extant image of Arbella, an individual whose iconography has long been both confused and confusing. For example, over the past four centuries many portraits of women with long, flowing hair have been said to depict her, often with no evidence.<sup>39</sup> It also almost certainly offers a rare glimpse of the appearance of Greenwich Palace, and one of its formal gardens, in the final years of Elizabeth I's reign.

Finally, these findings shed new light on the Ditchley Portrait. Although the painting has long been dated c.1592 on the grounds that it must have been commissioned in connection with the lavish festivities staged by Henry Lee (1533–1611) for the queen at Ditchley Park, Oxfordshire, in September 1592, the precise date and original purpose of the painting have been much debated.<sup>40</sup> Was it commissioned after her progress visit, made to serve a purely commemorative purpose? Or was it commissioned prior to her visit, so that it could be unveiled in the course of the festivities and, perhaps, incorporated into some of the dramatic entertainments that involved the queen being led to a pavilion hung with allegorical paintings so that she could examine them? The unmistakable echoes of the Ditchley Portrait in Hilliard's cabinet miniature of Arbella would suggest that the latter scenario is the correct one. Gheeraerts the Younger's work on the portrait must have been well-advanced, if not complete, by the summer of 1592, for Hilliard surely saw the Ditchley Portrait, and took inspiration from it, while working on this cabinet miniature.

London 1967 [Catholic Record Society LVIII], pp.214–15.

<sup>30</sup> For Ranuccio's whereabouts, see A. Marek y Villarino de Brugge: *Alessandro Farnese: Prince of Parma, Governor-General of the Netherlands (1545–1592)*, independently published 2021, V, p.323.

<sup>31</sup> For Parma and Ranuccio as patrons and collectors, see, for example, G. Bertini: *La galleria del Duca di Parma: storia di una collezione*, Parma 1987; and B.W. Meijer: *Parma e Bruxelles: committenza e collezionismo farnesiani alle due corte*, Parma 1988.

<sup>32</sup> Hatfield House, Cecil Papers (hereafter CP), letter from Michael Moody to either Lord Burghley or Sir Robert Cecil, 14th October 1591.

See also *Historical Manuscripts Commission Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. The Marquis of Salisbury*, K.G., London 1892, IV, p.144.

<sup>33</sup> NA, SP 12/241, fol.182, letter from Reinold Boseley to Sir Robert Cecil, 7th April 1592.

<sup>34</sup> HMS, fol.4r. Many courtiers sent letters or gifts of welcome to Bess shortly after she reached Cheyne Walk. But Sir Robert's was the first, pre-dating all others by at least a week, suggesting both that he was better-versed than others as to her whereabouts and also, perhaps, particularly eager to communicate some news to her.

<sup>35</sup> NA, E 403/2559/332v.

<sup>36</sup> On 7th December 1591, four days before the grant was officially enrolled, Burghley made a note in his diary reading, 'A forfeiture of 400 l. granted to Nicholas Hilliard', an indication that someone at court had been forced to forfeit land or goods worth £400 to generate that amount, in cash, for Hilliard, see CP, 'Burghley's Diary', fol.105r.

<sup>37</sup> As Sir Thomas Morgan reported to Burghley in a letter written 6th June 1592 at Bruges, 'I can aduertise no certaine newes of the duke of Parma. [. . .] Some say he is verie sicke, [. . .] some deade', CP, vol.168, fol.199.

<sup>38</sup> See Marek y Villarino de Brugge, *op.*

*cit.* (note 30), pp.349, 356 and 378–79.

<sup>39</sup> On this point, see Strong, *op. cit.* (note 11), I, pp.303–04.

<sup>40</sup> For a range of views, see, for example, E. Goldring: 'Portraiture, patronage, and the progresses', in *idem*, J. Archer and S. Knight, eds: *The Progresses, Pageants and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, Oxford 2007, pp.184–88; G. Heaton: 'The Ditchley Portrait', in E. Goldring, *et al.*, eds: *John Nichols's 'The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I'*, Oxford 2014, III, pp.703–04; Strong, *op. cit.* (note 7), pp.135–41; and F. Yates: *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, London 1985, p.106.