

### ■ Middle Ages and Renaissance

**Jacopo Aconcio.** *Trattato sulle fortificazioni.* Edited by **Paola Giacomoni**, with the collaboration of **Giovanni Maria Fara** and **Renato Giacomelli**. Translated by **Omar Khalaf**. (Studi e Testi, 48.) v + 212 pp., illus., index. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2011. €28.

In 1559 Jacopo Aconcio arrived in England as a Protestant refugee, seeking his fortune first in land reclamation and other technical innovations, and later in what today would be called defense consultancy. Already the author of a philosophical tract, *De Methodo* (1558), he would soon become widely known internationally for his treatise urging religious toleration, the *Strategemata Satanae Libri Octo* (1565). He was also known to have written a treatise on fortification. Being Italian helped here, because fortification using geometrically designed bastions with interlocking fields of defensive fire—the so-called *trace Italienne*—was then the most scientific aspect of modern warfare, and a treatise from a celebrated intellectual inevitably aroused interest.

Born in the Trentino around 1520, Aconcio trained as a lawyer and notary and between 1549 and 1556 worked in Vienna and Milan—closely associated with the imperial authorities—before his heretical beliefs took him into exile to Zurich, Basel, and Strasbourg and, finally, to England. Between 1564 and his probable death in 1566 or 1567 he enjoyed a royal pension and advised on the border fortification of Berwick-upon-Tweed, which was much the largest English project and among the first fully to exploit bastioned fortification. Manuscript copies of his treatise were almost certainly distributed as part of his job search. It was described in a letter of 1562 to a Zurich friend, Johann Wolf, who was told that the Italian text was then being translated into Latin. It was mentioned again in one of his Berwick reports in 1564. But the treatise never appeared in print, either in Latin or in Italian. However, during the 1980s Stephen Johnson of Oxford University's Museum of Science found an illustrated manuscript of Aconcio's "Booke of Fortefyinge" in the Petworth House Archives (MS HMC 143). It was dated 1573 and addressed to the Earl of Bedford by the translator, Thomas Blundeville. It is this English text, translated back into Italian by Omar Khalaf, that Paola Giacomoni and her academic collaborators have published in an excellent scholarly edition.

Giacomoni's editorial introduction discusses Aconcio's intellectual background and its application to military technology, themes elaborated in Renato Giacomelli's chapter on methodology. In another chapter Giovanni Maria Fara analyzes his potential sources in the first generation of printed military treatises published by Pietro Cataneo (1554), Lanteri (1557), Girolamo Cataneo (1564), and Maggi and Castriotto (1564). Fara is surely right to conclude that Aconcio's work—seen narrowly as a contribution to the developing science of fortification—is at best mainstream and to ask whether Blundeville simply translated Aconcio's Italian/Latin original of circa 1562 or actively edited it (as he did other works) more than a decade later.

Although the treatise itself does not break new ground in terms of fortification, Aconcio's approach strikes me as interestingly different. This is not simply a how-to-do-it design manual, prefaced (as were so many) by tedious chapters on the geometrical skills needed by would-be military engineers. Nor is it an advertisement for the military services of a war veteran—but, rather, those of a civil servant. In one of his Berwick reports Aconcio (in a disarmingly frank autobiographical passage) describes how he gained his own understanding of fortification while in civilian imperial service in Milan, learning from the many veterans of the Italian Wars and in particular from the distinguished military engineer Giovanni Maria Olgiati, who shared with him the lessons of his own blunders as well as those of others—the doctrine of "experience," as expounded in *De Methodo*. The "Booke of Fortefyinge" is addressed to rulers and their advisors, explaining basics, removing mysteries, briefing men of affairs on what questions needed to be asked of the technical experts: "Wherefore all princes and common weales, at whose great costes soche holdes and fortes are to be buylte, hadd need alwaies to take good heede whom they admitt to be theire ingeners." Aconcio thus defines for himself a role as intermediary in the dissemination of the new science (or was it an art?) of fortification. It is this that makes the treatise interesting and important.

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**Wendy Beth Hyman** (Editor). *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature.* vi + 209 pp., illus., bibl., index. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011. £55 (cloth).

This new installment in the Ashgate series "Literary and Scientific Cultures of Early Modernity" studies automata in English Renaissance