

Reviews

Baldassarre Castiglione diplomatico: la missione del Cortegiano. By RAFFAELE RUGGIERO. (Biblioteca dell'Archivum Romanicum, Serie 1, Storia, letteratura, paleografia, 471) Florence: Olschki. 2017. xv+151 pp. €22. ISBN 978-88-222-6513-5.

R06078 In 2016 two important works dedicated to Baldassarre Castiglione were published: the complete edition of his family and diplomatic letters (*Lettere famigliari e diplomatiche*, ed. by Guido La Rocca, Angelo Stella, and Umberto Morando; *Lettera ad Alfonso Valdés*, ed. by Paolo Pintacuda, with notes by Roberto Vetrugno and a note on the illustrations by Luca Bianco, 3 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 2016)), and the three-volume edition of *Il libro del Cortegiano*, edited by Amedeo Quondam (Rome: Bulzoni, 2016), which contains the *editio princeps* (vol. I), the text of the manuscript Ashburnhamiano 409 preserved in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence (vol. II), and a description of the evolution of the dialogue from manuscript to printed book (vol. III). These works offer a solid basis for this monograph by Raffaele Ruggiero, who aims to read the *Cortegiano* through the lens of the diplomatic experience of his author.

Through a close reading of the letters sent to Castiglione's relatives, friends, patrons, and colleagues, Ruggiero reviews the role that Castiglione played on the European political scene, from his first journey to England in 1506, on behalf of the Duke of Urbino Guidubaldo da Montefeltro, to his last mission as papal nuncio in Spain, between 1525 and 1529. The analysis of Castiglione's diplomatic career results in a detailed history of Italian (and European) politics in the first thirty years of the sixteenth century. In some cases, the reconstruction of the broader framework seems more relevant than Castiglione's personal contribution, as shown by the chapter dedicated to the Medici papacy (pp. 27–45). However, this solid background—though with some minor redundancies (as in the descriptions of Pope Adrian VI at pp. 54 and 58)—is never an end in itself; rather, it is meant to support a critical interpretation of the choices made by Castiglione. The attention paid to the politics of Leo X, for example, is designed to explain Castiglione's passage from Urbino to Rome: 'una transizione che non è solo legata a scelte opportunistiche e personali, ma che si sposa con una esatta valutazione sul tramonto delle piccole signorie italiane e sull'esigenza di una voce autorevole (quella dello stato ecclesiastico) per tenere l'Italia almeno su un piano paritario rispetto alle potenze europee' (p. 33). The acknowledgement of the weakness of Italian courts and the need for a different involvement of Italy on the international scene has a direct impact on the functions of the intellectuals, gradually transformed from courtiers into secretaries. This is an aspect which, according to Ruggiero, deeply influences the evolution of *Il Cortegiano* and, particularly, the writing of its fourth and final book.

In the first part of Castiglione's diplomatic career, one addressee in particular stands out from his letters: namely, his mother Aloisia Gonzaga, who appears as a 'donna esperta e attenta alle evoluzioni della politica italiana ed europea' and a 'consigliera prudente' (p. 1). The interest in contemporary political matters shown

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by Aloisia is noticeable, not only for the pieces of advice that she gives to her son, but also for the influence that her model might have had on the way Castiglione represents women and addresses the *querelle des femmes* in the third book of *Il Cortegiano*. This is not the only connection between his correspondence and the dialogue. In fact, his letters frequently anticipate or mirror topics that have an absolute relevance in the text, such as the influence of *fortuna* on human lives (p. 44), 'l'attenzione [. . .] prestata agli aspetti cerimoniali' (p. 72), and, above all, the interest in a regulated use of language(s) (p. 91). Trained in the (humanistic and diplomatic) art of perfect communication, Castiglione identifies in an effective conversation the main goal of an ideal courtier. This is, as stated in the subtitle of the book by Ruggiero, the 'mission' of *Il Cortegiano*, a text that can thus stand as 'il lessico della classe dirigente europea' (p. 110), even after the crisis of Italian courts.

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