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Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria* has long been known as a literary product of the Venetian Quattrocento, but its message was not until recently deeply examined nor its impact understood. Interest accelerated in the early twentieth century: in 1915, it received a critical edition by Attilio Gnesotto, and in 1933, its first modern translation, into German, by Percy Gothein. During the 1970s, as interest in social history, and especially the experience of women mounted, the *De re uxoria* received some attention from mainly Anglophone scholars. From the 1990s, following upon his exhaustive investigation of Barbaro's *epistolario* that culminated in a definitive edition in two volumes (1991, 1999), Claudio Griggio turned his attention to the *De re uxoria*. That effort culminates in the present 2021 edition, translation, and critical study, co-authored by Griggio and his former student Chiara Kravina, who contributes with equal energy, discernment, and potency to its execution. In consequence, what specialists would have learned from Griggio's publications over thirty years is now broadly promulgated: Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria* is to be recognized as not only one of the most important products of Venetian humanism, but also, arguably, of Italian or even European humanism more broadly.

Leaving substance aside for the moment, mere numbers tell the story. By 1992, Griggio had noted the existence of 101 manuscripts of the *De re uxoria*. To that already large number, Kravina's investigations added 31. Three being removed from the resulting cumulus, the total comes to 129, nearly all created in the fifteenth century, now inhabiting 68 different libraries in Italy and abroad. That figure of 129, as a rough measure of its significance, may be compared to the approximately 120 manuscripts of Pier Paolo Vergerio's *De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus adulescentiae studiis*; the some 100 of Giovanni Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*; the some 60 of Leonardo Bruni's *De studiis et litteris*; the some 40 of Lorenzo Valla's *De donatione Constantini*; or the some 30 of Leon Battista Alberti's *De pictura*. As Kravina rightly asserts, this «vasta e variegata tradizione manoscritta», this «ingente quantità di codici sparsi oggi in tutto il mondo» testifies to the standing of the *De re uxoria* as «una delle opere più lette e conosciute anche al di fuori dei confini italiani» (p. 122). The *De re uxoria* later circulated in print, the *editio princeps* of Paris 1513 being followed by subsequent French, Flemish, German, Dutch, English, and Italian editions and translations through 1806, 109 years before Gnesotto's edition of 1915. As a guide to social behavior that appealed to readers across Europe, the *De re uxoria* may be compared, without exaggeration, to Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, composed about a century after the *De re uxoria* and first printed in 1528.

Kravina's meticulous report on the circulation of *De re uxoria* in manuscript and print versions (supplemented in an appendix by a complete list of manuscript witnesses) arrives only in the two final sections of her critical introduction, which occupies the first part of the full volume. In that introduction, Kravina explores the

origins, principal themes, and impact of the work. The first section, on the genesis and purpose of the *De re uxoria*, identifies the context within which it was conceived: the circumstances of Barbaro's 1415 visit to Florence, the stature of women in Venetian society, the pressure of dowry inflation, and the influence of Barbaro's mentors Zaccaria Trevisan, Gasparino Barzizza, and Guarino Veronese. The second, on the work's structure and main themes, considers prevailing assumptions about marriage, the role of the wife as mother and household manager, and the ideal that Barbaro embraces of the conjunction of two spouses as an «unione giuridica, etica ed economica». The third identifies the major classical influences on Barbaro's thought – especially Xenophon and Plutarch, but also Homer, Aesop, and Plato – as well as the impact of Christian (especially Augustine) and contemporary authors. The fourth discusses the *De re uxoria* in relation to other important expressions of the Italian and European Renaissance including, among humanist texts, to Leon Battista Alberti's *Della famiglia*, Ermolao Barbaro's *De coelibatu*, and Juan Luis Vives's *De institutione foeminae christianae*; among literary works, to Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* and Baldassare Castiglione's *Cortegiano*; and to contemporary theoretical discussions of women's nature and capacity (the *querelle des femmes*) and of marriage and the family. This section culminates with Kravina's analysis of the frescoes by Paolo Veronese adorning the Villa Barbaro at Maser, built by Barbaro's descendants, which illustrate themes drawn from the *De re uxoria*: marriage, conjugal love, procreation, the management of the household, and the education of children.

The volume's second part contains the note on the text, critical edition, translation, and commentary, all by Claudio Griggio. In the note on the text, Griggio identifies the five manuscript witnesses upon which the edition is based, and cites relevant critical studies and editions. The Latin edition, with facing-page Italian translation, is annotated in two systems and is followed by a robust commentary elaborating upon persons and issues emerging from the texts. To these components are added a comprehensive bibliography and five indexes by Kravina, the last usefully sorting out references to manuscripts and their annotations, names of persons and places, classical authors, and terms and topics. In the sum, this edition of *De re uxoria* is a massive and definitive achievement.

Why then did this work on marriage, written by a young man as yet unmarried, achieve such astounding success in Italy and abroad? Because, briefly, of the pressing cultural importance of the issues it raises. Addressing his peers – Venetian patricians aspiring to high position and substantial wealth – Barbaro directs them urgently not to do what such men often did: that is, to choose a wife on the basis of the dowry wealth she offered. (The focus on the dowry, importantly, is embedded in the title of the work, which alludes to the *res uxoria*, a term denoting in Roman law the dowry a woman brings to a marriage.) Rather, noble youths should choose women on the basis of their moral character and intellectual capacity; for only women richly endowed with these qualities could conceive, generate, and educate sons who would bring luster to the family and advance the interests of the state.

In asserting these principles, Barbaro draws on Christian, medical, legal, philosophical, and classical literary texts, exhibiting the learning he had earlier acquired in his legal studies at the university at Padua, his study of rhetoric with Gasparino Barzizza, and above all, his intensive study of Greek with Guarino Veronese, his teacher and «foremost friend» («quo preceptore et amico uno omnium familiarissime utor», p. 290). In 1414 to 1415, on his return from Constantinople where he had pursued advanced studies in the Greek tradition, Guarino worked closely with Barbaro, engaging his eager student in his own scholarly endeavors. In

addition, Barbaro benefited from the tutelage of Zaccaria Trevisan, an elder Venetian statesman and the earliest prominent figure of Venetian humanism, who conversed often with the young man, as the text reveals, about the crucial importance of marriage for the flourishing of the Venetian nobility.

Although Barbaro is in no way a feminist in a modern sense, in constructing his argument in favor of deliberate marital decisions untouched by mercenary impulse, he builds a strong pro-woman case – one remarkable for that era. Leaning to the Galenic over the Aristotelian notion of conception and embryology, he emphasizes the contribution of the female to human reproduction. That contribution is understood to be not merely physiological, although it is that – the woman's body is likened to a fertile field that produces sound fruit – but it is also moral and intellectual. Those moral and intellectual capacities are transmitted from mother to child, Barbaro maintains, drawing on some strands of then-current medical thinking, first by her blood, which nourished the fetus in the womb, and later by her milk (understood to be blood in another form), which nourished the infant at her breast. The nurturance of the child that she delivers through her body, moreover, continues during childhood, when the mother is the principal educator of the child. Only a child nurtured by such a mother can bestow glory on his clan and his city. The nobleman cannot rear such a son by himself; he must marry a wife whose role, from conception through childhood, is critical.

Fittingly, Barbaro wrote *De re uxoria* as a wedding gift for his friend Lorenzo de' Medici (the elder), brother of Cosimo de' Medici, the later unofficial ruler of Florence. Barbaro had come to know Lorenzo in Florence in the summer of 1415, when Barbaro also met the humanist luminaries who regularly gathered in the Medici household. In early 1416, Lorenzo was to marry Ginevra Cavalcanti, both bride and groom being the offspring of eminent families within the Florentine elite, thus belonging to the same social rank that Barbaro occupied in Venice. Barbaro intended the *De re uxoria*, composed in the last months of 1415 just prior to the nuptial celebration, as a wedding present: in lieu of a jeweled necklace («uxorium, ut sic dixerim, monile», p. 290), as he explains to Lorenzo, he offers a gift not from Francesco's fortune, but from Francesco himself («potius a Francisco tuo quam a fortuna sua», p. 176). What a spectacle this is! Two high-ranking noblemen, destined for brilliant careers, each surrounded by the towering personalities of the first humanist generation! How could these conjunctions not summon forth a book?

Occasioned by the conversations between the Venetian Francesco Barbaro and the Florentine Lorenzo de' Medici, the *De re uxoria*, as its legacy in manuscript and print attests, also aroused the interest of northern elites who, like their Italian neighbors, sought to preserve a cultural hegemony that would endure for generations to come. Northern and southern, romance and Germanic, burgher and noble, Protestant and Catholic: the ruling strata everywhere faced the same threat of extinction lest they were saved by wives whose bodies, minds, and souls alone could engender the progeny who would secure their legacy. Yet the natural matrix of the *De re uxoria* was essentially Venetian, originating in that city where a legally-defined noble caste could hope to rule only so long as it reproduced itself both biologically and culturally. The first major work of Venetian humanism, the *De re uxoria* is a stunning case of the intersection of intellectual discourse and political, social, and cultural structures.

There is warrant for some uneasiness about two discussions in the critical introduction. As I have previously argued, Alberti's *Famiglia* (see pp. 67-73) and Ermolao Barbaro's *De coelibatu* (pp. 73-76) seem to be in tension with Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria*, and more so than Kravina contends; and I would read Percy

Gothein, Barbaro's biographer and translator of the *De re uxoria* (see pp. 119-121), as propounding conservative social values commonplace in the 1930s (repellent as they may seem to many readers today) rather than as an exponent of the Nazi ideology of which he came to be a victim. Perhaps these are matters scholars can return to and debate.

But significantly, Claudio Griggio and Chiara Kravina have bestowed upon us a generous prize in their edition, translation, and analysis of Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria* – a gift as precious as was the jeweled necklace in the guise of a book that Francesco gave to his friend Lorenzo.

MARGARET L. KING