

**Barbaro, Francesco.**

***De re uxoria*. Eds. Claudio Griggio, and Chiara Kravina.**

Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento. Studi e testi 53. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2021. Pp. xiv, 426 + 7 col. tables. ISBN 978-88-222-6728-3 (paperback) €55.

Between the summer of 1415 and the spring of 1416, the Venetian patrician and humanist Francesco Barbaro wrote the text *De re uxoria*. Barbaro had been a guest of the Medici family and thus had associated with most of the leading humanists in Florence in mid-1415. He probably wrote much of his text in the months after his return to Venice and then, in the spring of 1416, Barbaro dedicated his work to Lorenzo di Giovanni de' Medici, brother of the more famous Cosimo de' Medici. The book enjoyed great success and influence over subsequent centuries and remains a key text for its insights into a range of aspects of fifteenth-century culture. Claudio Griggio and Chiara Kravina have written a learned volume that specialists from a range of subfields should read.

For most readers in North America, *De re uxoria* is undoubtedly best known in excerpt through Benjamin Kohl's English translation of the preface and of book two (in Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, eds., *The Earthly Republic* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978], 189–228) or, more recently, through Margaret King's full English translation of the text published for the Other Voice series (*The Wealth of Wives* [Toronto: Iter Press, 2015]). Both Kohl's and King's translations were based upon a Latin edition from 1915, while the book under review here uses a new reading of key manuscript witnesses to present a new critical edition and translation into Italian, along with a comprehensive and learned introduction and textual commentary. Both Kravina and Griggio have published extensively on Barbaro's *De re uxoria* in recent years, while Claudio Griggio was the editor of the most recent edition of Francesco Barbaro's letters (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1991–1999). Although a short review cannot fully compare the analysis and translations contained in the volumes by Griggio and Kravina with that by King, interested readers can find a full discussion in Kravina's longer review of King's book published in the journal *Archivio Storico Italiano* in 2016.

Chiara Kravina's introduction lays out a comprehensive analysis of the ideas and reception of Barbaro's text. Kravina begins by contextualizing Barbaro's ideas in the text amidst his contemporaries as well as medieval and

classical authors. She highlights areas of novelty and areas where the text follows the leads of others. In the introduction's second half, Kravina demonstrates the influence of Barbaro's text on a surprising range of well-known and lesser-known authors. It is clear, for example, that Leon Battista Alberti and Ermolao Barbaro wrote works in dialogue with Francesco Barbaro's earlier text. In addition, in the sixteenth century, Barbaro's text remained popular enough to influence Castiglione, Ariosto, Vives, and Erasmus, sometimes because those authors were reading Barbaro's text itself and, at other times, reading other texts heavily influenced by *De re uxoria*. That extraordinary influence matches the diffusion of the text during the Renaissance and early modern periods. *De re uxoria* survives in 129 full or fragmentary manuscript copies that follow multiple paths of circulation. A shortened version of the text was even created and circulated in the mid-fifteenth century with at least five copies surviving. During the sixteenth century, the work was published in Latin and in French, Italian, and German translations, with an English version arriving somewhat later in 1677. The popularity of the book peaked during the 1400s and 1500s while waning significantly in the eighteenth century.

Claudio Griggio has presented an Italian translation and Latin text based upon a revised reading of the manuscripts than the previous critical edition published in 1915. For that earlier edition, Attilio Gnesotto had relied upon a manuscript in the Laurenzian Library in Florence. However, Griggio convincingly argues that that particular manuscript in fact was a copy of a different extant manuscript, also in the Laurenzian Library. Using this rereading, Griggio is able to reconstruct some of the earliest paths through which *De re uxoria* was read and circulated. For example, he reveals the key role played by Guarino Veronese in the promotion of the text. He shows how the text could be grouped with other humanist texts by Pier Paolo Vergerio and by Pseudo-Plutarch to form a broader pedagogical manual. The result of this philological work is a Latin text based upon the Laurenzian manuscript with attention also paid to a handful of other copies. The translation into Italian offers a readable text that also provides a good sense of the Latin original. Across eighteen chapters Barbaro defines his terms, offers advice for when and whom to marry, and suggests various tasks that women should do. Barbaro draws his information from a variety of sources. At times he claims to be relating the advice from his Venetian mentor, Zaccaria Trevisan. At other times Barbaro claims that certain recommendations reflect common practice. At all points

his advice is backed up through examples and anecdotes drawn from classical texts, with Plutarch and Pseudo-Plutarch enjoying particular prominence, and with careful notes in the edition that trace the origins of Barbaro's anecdotes. At the text's conclusion, the edition contains fifty pages of learned commentary—roughly the same length as the text itself—that explain Barbaro's references, some key variations and/or annotations in the manuscript witnesses, as well as other topics.

Taken together, this volume includes an erudite introduction and excellent apparatus to accompany a key humanist Latin text translated into a clear Italian. It is an impressive achievement that will become a reference point for studies of Venice and a full range of topics related to the Italian Renaissance.

BRIAN JEFFREY MAXSON

East Tennessee State University

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v46i3.42704>