

Andrea Lamberti (ed.), Lodovico Antonio Muratori, *Delle forze dell'intendimento umano o sia il pirronismo confutato*, [Biblioteca dell'edizione nazionale del carteggio di L.A. Muratori 13]. Olschki, Florence 2020, xxiv + 231 pp. ISBN 9788822266842. €28.50.

Andrea Lamberti (ed.), Lodovico Antonio Muratori, *Della forza della fantasia umana*, [Biblioteca dell'edizione nazionale del carteggio di L.A. Muratori 14]. Olschki, Florence 2020, xxiii + 166 pp. ISBN 9788822266835. €24.70.

Fabio Marri (Ed.), *Muratori tra storia e religione. Atti della Giornata di studi muratoriani (Modena, 3 novembre 2020)* [Biblioteca dell'edizione nazionale del carteggio di L.A. Muratori 15]. Olschki, Florence 2021, vi + 254 pp. ISBN 9788822267788. €33.25.

Lodovico Antonio Muratori was a model of versatility—a philosopher, a theologian, a social reformer, a scientist, an antiquarian, and a historian. He wrote with a lucidity which makes his works a pleasure to read and he put his gifts at the service of his particular brand of Catholic rationalism. The publication by Olschki of the beautifully produced editions of two of his most interesting texts, presented by Francesca Maria Crasta and edited by Andrea Lamberti, is more than welcome. The two works both appeared in 1745, five years before Muratori's death in Modena, and are among the more important expressions of a philosophical approach which had matured over the years. The first, *Delle forze dell'intendimento umano o sia il pirronismo confutato*, is an attack on 'pyrrhonism,' and more specifically on the scepticism defended by Pierre-Daniel Huet, bishop of Avranches, in his *Traité philosophique sur la faiblesse de l'esprit humain* published posthumously in 1723. Huet argued that pyrrhonism, the idea that human reason was incapable of reaching any certainty, was a necessary condition for the acceptance of the truth of religious faith, the nucleus of which remained incomprehensible to man. Muratori was one of a number of scholars who doubted the authenticity of the authorship of the *Traité*, claiming that it was in too great a contrast with Huet's earlier works for it to have been by the bishop. About this they were proved wrong. Muratori went on to reject Huet's distinction between the weakness of human understanding and the perfect certainty of faith attended by divine grace. In a vast number of cases Muratori held that man could rely on knowledge derived from the senses. Scepticism, on the other hand, could lead to materialism, libertinism and, ultimately, atheism. It was faith, Muratori claimed, that must precede reason. There would follow a rational approach supported by knowledge gained from experience and from the study of history and science.

With his *Della forza della fantasia umana* Muratori drew various conclusions from what can be regarded as his own form of scepticism—a Cartesian criticism of received knowledge and a belief in the scientific progress resulting from it. Imagination, he wrote, is a corporeal and material power which transmits images to the spiritual and incorporeal power of the intellect. He warned against its ability to deceive and analysed the various cases in which it does so, fostering superstition and thus undermining the rational form of religious faith by which we should be guided. He examined phenomena such as dreams and somnambulism, folly and deliria, ecstasies and visions, and beliefs in magic and witchcraft, boldly submitting many of the popular superstitions of the time to a rational and scientific analysis and dismissing them accordingly. He concluded that, powerful though it might be, the imagination will never be able to subjugate our ‘free will’ to such an extent as to destroy the ultimate dominion of the intellect. It can be kept in check by a sound Catholic education based on the principles of the Gospels and the love of virtue, and supported by edifying literature (such as the Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers), good sermons, and meditation on the Christian mysteries, assisted, above all, by divine grace.

As one might expect of such an illustrious thinker, Muratori has become the subject of a long series of conferences. *Muratori tra storia e religione* edited by Fabio Marri, contains the acts of the latest, held in Modena on 3 November 2020. It includes some fifteen papers, of varied length and quality, to which are added the different addresses pronounced at the opening of the meeting. Some of the papers bring out new or little studied sides of Muratori. Erio Castellucci, the present bishop of Modena, the city in which Muratori had been educated by the Jesuits and worked as ducal archivist and librarian from 1700 until his death fifty years later, deals with Muratori’s pastoral activities. Strongly inspired by St Carlo Borromeo (whose descendant, Count Carlo Borromeo, had employed him at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan before he returned to Modena), Muratori, in 1720, founded the *Compagnia della carità*, run by influential laymen, in an effort to combat the problems caused by the poverty afflicting Modena. Not only did the *Compagnia* dispense alms, but it saw to the establishment of professional schools, the foundation of hospitals and hospices for the old, and endeavoured to defend prisoners languishing in jail. Its main objective was to revive the economy of the duchy by providing training and occupation, and to free it of beggary, theft, gambling, and prostitution.

One of Muratori’s most important works was on the plague, *Del governo della peste e delle maniere di guardarsene* of 1714. Sceptical about superstition and magic, he discussed the current idea of a deliberate propagation of the plague by way of unguents which had led to the execution of numerous innocent citi-

zens, whose confessions had been extracted by torture, during the plague that visited Milan in 1630. It was this same plague that was to play a major role in Manzoni's famous novel *Promessi sposi*. Muratori was one of Manzoni's principal sources and his influence is discussed by Caterina Bonasegla. In the first edition of his *Governo della peste* Muratori expressed his full horror at the manner in which the suspects were treated, but in the 1722 edition he went further and was prepared to deny that unguents had been used unless conclusive evidence was submitted to the contrary. Manzoni, however, referring to the 1714 edition, felt that Muratori had not gone far enough in his condemnation of the episode.

In his own day Muratori was best known as a historian, and Marta Soli has devoted a long article to his research into the origins of surnames, showing how he used the archives of Modena and comparing the results of his investigations with those of his predecessors, contemporaries, and successors. In spite of his scepticism where magic and superstition were concerned, Muratori was cautious in his historical judgements. This emerges from the strange case of the discovery, in the church of S. Piero in Ciel d'oro in Pavia, of what a number of scholars, basing themselves on an inscription, regarded as the remains of the corpse of St Augustine. Angelo Colombo analyses the various views of the attribution and shows that Muratori was clearly most suspicious of it and could not agree with the Augustinian Giusto Fontanini, who had been instructed by the pope, Benedict XIII, to look into the matter in the hope of establishing that they were genuine and exploiting them for the glory of his own Order. In the end Muratori, rather than proclaiming that the relics were manifestly false, simply advised due prudence in assessing them. Muratori was cautious too in his involvement in the dispute between the Bollandists and the Carmelites. He himself was an admirer of the Bollandists but, besides slight reservations about some of their work, he was, as Maria Lieber and Valentina Cuomo show in their piece on his correspondence with the Dutch Jesuit Coenraad Janning, hesitant in defending his friend Daniel Papenbroch.

With his rigorously rational principles, Muratori obviously had his critics and enemies. Fontanini and his relatives, for example, never forgave him for not accepting the authenticity of Augustine's relics. But he also entered into conflict with the Jesuits. Not only had he been educated by the Jesuits in Modena, but he was profoundly influenced by the Jesuit Paolo Segneri, admired the Bollandists, and was an enthusiastic supporter of the Jesuit experiments in Paraguay. Nevertheless he was deeply opposed to the so-called 'voto sanguinario,' a vow launched by the Jesuits in Sicily to defend with their blood the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. For Muratori this was a superstition, and should be dismissed as such. His publication on the subject, the *De inge-*

*niorum moderatione in religionis negotio* which appeared in 1714, drew a fierce attack from the Sicilian Jesuits who, as Daniela Gianaroli shows, accused him of heresy.

Muratori was a fine stylist. In this volume Gabriele Burzacchini studies his style in Latin which displays a simplicity and clarity similar to what we find in his Italian. But what about his Greek? While he had learnt Latin at school, Muratori found that he had to teach himself Greek and was never altogether satisfied with the result. Burzacchini has provided a critical version, with abundant footnotes, of a previously unpublished letter written in Greek in 1693, when Muratori was aged twenty, and sent to Benedetto Bacchini, the future prior of the Benedictine Order in Modena whom Muratori regarded as his teacher. It was an attempt to show Bacchini the extent of his progress.

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