

Bindo Da Travale. Chronicle (1315–1416). Edited and translated by Alison Williams Lewin

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Bindo Da Travale. *Chronicle (1315–1416)*. Edited and translated by Alison Williams Lewin. Toronto: CRRS, 2021. Pp. 314. ISBN 9780772725158.

Bindo da Travale's *Chronicle* presents an idiosyncratic account of Italian political events between roughly 1381 and 1416. The chronicle focuses overwhelmingly on the wars fought between Tuscany and Ladislaus, King of Naples. Most scholars of the period will find the work's Siennese perspective on events different than the usual Florentine-centric point of view. This lively translation makes an important and at times entertaining text more accessible to students and scholars.

Bindo da Travale was a member of the artists' guild in Siena, although no surviving artistic works have been attributed to him. He was born in the mid-1360s and it is not clear when exactly he left Travale. By 1385 he had married in Siena. The couple had two sons, both of whom appear in the chronicle's pages: Numerous times the chronicle records that one of Bindo's sons was writing what Bindo was dictating. In part because of such statements, the composition of the chronicle is difficult to tease out. It is sometimes unclear when specific passages were written. At times it is difficult to assess what role the sons had in the work's composition. The chronicle ends abruptly without conclusion or explanation. Nevertheless, the extraordinary level of detail in some passages suggests Bindo's high-level access to information, even as he is frequently unreliable in his details and fills many pages of the work with invented speeches. The chronicle exists in only a single manuscript, which is probably a copy of an earlier version.

After a brief beginning, the overwhelming majority of the chronicle follows the actions of King Ladislaus of Naples from 1405 until 1414, especially as they pertained to Siena and Florence. In the conflict, King Ladislaus often fought against King Louis and Louis's papal and Tuscan allies. Throughout the political narrative Bindo reveals interesting insights into a range of topics. For example, he reveals a Siennese perspective at Florentine conquests in Tuscany, especially over Pisa. Other details add flavour to Bindo's text. For example, Bindo sprinkles in implicit assumptions about his neighbours and their rulers: He clearly admired King Ladislaus, despite the frequent wars between the king and Siena. Simultaneously, he often viewed Florence with disdain, despite the alliance between Siena and that city. Bindo's comments about himself are often self-deprecating, such as introducing himself as a former pig farmer. He then usually contrasts those humble characterizations by writing elaborate, fictionalized diplomatic speeches. Comments about astrology are common, as are paraphrases of biblical stories and to a lesser

extent classical ones. As a reader it is difficult to tell when Bindo's reliability begins and where it ends. In some cases, he applies Sienese ideas about government to other cities or describes those cities as if they were broken into the same sorts of zones as Siena. In other cases, Bindo lists dozens of men who participated in political councils or who gathered troops for an army. It is possible that these often obscure details were sometimes the invention of Bindo's mind—described in turns as “empty,” “foolish,” “fantastical,” “stupid” and other similar words.

However, even so, they were the inventions of a person who was exceptionally curious and aware of politics in and especially outside his city.

This is an excellent translation of a challenging, idiosyncratic text originally written in the Sienese vernacular. The introduction provides readers, even non-specialists, with the details that they will need to read and enjoy the work. At times managing the chronicle's length and increasing its accessibility led to editorial decisions. For example, the translation omits certain repetitive passages from the original manuscript and keeps footnotes to a minimum. Readers curious about those occasionally omitted sections can find them in the recent Italian edition of Vittorio Lusini's text from 1903; while the publication of this new translation will hopefully lead to additional scholarship to add more details about and explanations for Bindo's interesting text. The work presents Bindo as an example of an author participating in a popular vernacular culture, which could be another interesting area for future research to develop.

Another area that might be fruitful would be the relationship between Bindo's work and changing approaches to oratory at that time, especially given just how much attention and importance Bindo places upon the specific words that individuals, often diplomats, speak, and the increased importance placed on oratory during the early fifteenth century in Italy.

In short, Alison Lewin is to be commended for making more accessible a fascinating and even fun new text that presents a fresh perspective on the early Quattrocento.

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