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Renaissance et Réforme



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Alessandro Piccolomini (1508–1579) : un siennois à la croisée
des genres et des savoirs

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Piéjus, Marie-Françoise, Michel Plaisance, Matteo Residori, eds.

Alessandro Piccolomini (1508–1579): Un siennois à la croisée des genres et des savoirs.

Actes du Colloque International (Paris, 23–25 septembre 2010). Centre Interuniversitaire de Recherche sur la Renaissance Italienne, 31. Paris: Université Sorbonne Nouvelle Paris 3, 2011. Pp. 295. ISBN 978-2-900478-31-8 (paperback) €30.

The year 2008 marked the fifth centenary of the birth of Alessandro Piccolomini, a scholar and polymath who, more than almost anyone else, is said to embody the ideal Renaissance man. A brilliant and protean intellectual, he thrived within the structure of the Italian Renaissance academies, representing the best that his age had to offer.

The volume published by the University of Sorbonne Paris 3, edited by Marie-Françoise Piéjus, Michel Plaisance, and Matthew Residori, consists of sixteen essays addressing Piccolomini's various competencies, from mathematics to astronomy, from drama to linguistics. As the editors point out, Piccolomini's intellectual stature is such that "tous les spécialistes de la Renaissance ont subi la séduction à un moment ou à un autre" (9). The book is divided in a number of sections, addressing, among other topics, the relationship between Piccolomini and Siena, his contact with Padua, his vision of women, his theatrical pieces, as well as language, astronomy, mathematics, and his studies of the classics.

The book begins with an analysis of the relationship Piccolomini had with the two cities in which he lived (Siena and Padua) and their respective academies: the famous *Intronati* and the more turbulent *Infiammati*.

The remarkable essay by Franco Tomasi analyzes the influence of the Sienese literary milieu on Piccolomini. That investigation prompts Tomasi to discuss Sienese cultural life in the first decades of the century and the experience of the *Intronati*. In this essay, Piccolomini's varied cultural background comes to the fore. In the first phases of his erudite intellectual project, he pursues interests that he will fully develop later, such as love-inspired lyric poetry and the vulgarization of the classics.

In the second essay of the volume, Salvatore Lo Re deals with Piccolomini's relationship between the University of Padua, an Aristotelian stronghold, and the academy of the *Infiammati*. The author mostly concentrates on Piccolomini's

intellectual training in order to determine his connections with other Paduan intellectuals, in particular with Varchi.

While Piccolomini recognizes that Aristotelian scholar Sperone Speroni (40) represented a great influence on his thought, Lo Re points out that Varchi was also very significant, especially when it came to his poetic production. As the author points out in his conclusion, in order to study and understand Piccolomini, Speroni is not enough; one needs Varchi, too (51).

In a subsequent essay, Paul Larivaille analyzes the documents related to an alleged friendship between Piccolomini and the famous poet Pietro Aretino. Larivaille calls this friendship “legendary,” suggesting that it was probably not all it was made out to be. What emerges from this essay is an almost tender portrayal of Piccolomini as a young man (at the time he was about thirty) who tried hard to establish a friendship with the more celebrated author of the *Sonetti lussuriosi*. Larivaille surveys five letters exchanged between Aretino and Piccolomini, two from the former and three from the latter. Contacts between the two were “diversement mais régulièrement évoqués dans les études consacrées à l’Académie des Inflammati et à Piccolomini, plus rarement [...] dans les travaux sur la vie et les oeuvres de l’Arétin” (50). Based on this exchange, he surmises that Piccolomini was the one who had a keener interest in solidifying these sporadic contacts into a true friendship, whereas Aretino did not feel quite the same way; perhaps for the latter the relationship with Piccolomini was considered an ephemeral parenthesis (53).

Piccolomini’s vision of women holds a special place in his oeuvre. His dialogue *Of the beautiful manners of the women*, also known as the *Raffaella*, presents a “féminisme ambigu et un brin scandaleux, que défendait malicieusement le droit des femmes à l’amour, fût-ce dans l’adultère” (11). In two essays, both Konrad Eisenbichler and Marie-Françoise Piéjus show how Piccolomini’s intellectual world consisted of a network of relationships to which women contributed significantly.

Eisenbichler analyzes a *tenzone poetica*, that is, poems written by five Sienese ladies and inspired by a sonnet written by Piccolomini when he visited Petrarch’s tomb in Arquà. This poetic duel, as Eisenbichler points out, allows us to gain a deeper insight into Piccolomini’s cultural world by pointing to women’s participation in the intellectual and social world of the young Sienese scholar (102).

The essay by Piéjus analyzes the eulogy Piccolomini wrote for Sienese gentlewoman Aurelia Petrucci, sent to her sister after the funeral. Since it was written post-mortem, it was not meant to be read at the memorial. In the eulogy, Petrucci is represented as the ideal Renaissance woman—a paragon of domestic and social virtues—and illustrates Petrucci’s central role in Sienese society. It also shows how Piccolomini’s world was a place where women carried considerable practical and social clout. The oration is included in the book.

The value of this collection of essays, aside from being a remarkable work of erudition, is its ability to discuss the many facets of Piccolomini’s great and varied learning, as well as the remarkably active social and cultural life of the academies in the Renaissance.

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Raber, Karen.

Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture.

Haney Foundation Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. Pp. 235. ISBN 978-0-8122-4536-3 (hardcover) \$65.

Sir Philip Sidney famously opens his *Apology for Poetry* with an anecdote about how a dinner guest at Emperor Maximilian’s court waxed so poetical about the excellence of battle-steeds “that if I had not been a piece of a logician before I came to him, I think he would have persuaded me to have wished myself a horse.” Sidney’s joke is premised on the longstanding assumption that the ability to reason demarcates human from beast, and ineluctably elevates the former over the latter. No educated courtier would cross the species barrier—no matter how much he admired his animal companion. Yet in *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture*, Karen Raber (professor of English, University of Mississippi) dismantles the enduring misconception “that reason is the basis of human excellence” (1). An emerging understanding of our shared embodiment with animals—in genetic ancestry, in physiological functions, in sensory and cognitive processes—contradicts the anxious and self-interested separation of man from beast that has long enabled the domination and exploitation of the non-human. Although most Britons no longer depend on animals for