

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Brevaglieri, Sabina. Natural desiderio di sapere. Roma barocca fra vecchi e nuovi mondi

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doubt, the book under review has presented fresh material for further research on the topic.

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**Brevaglieri, Sabina.**

*Natural desiderio di sapere. Roma barocca fra vecchi e nuovi mondi.*

La corte dei papi 31. Rome: Viella, 2019. Pp. 476 + 32 ill. ISBN 978-8-8331-3233-4 (paperback) €49.

Sabina Brevaglieri's book *Natural desiderio di sapere. Roma barocca fra vecchi e nuovi mondi* is an original and welcome addition to scholarship which brings together work on the history of science and medicine, art patronage, scholarly networks, cultural diplomacy, and urban history. Her impressive evocation of the intellectual fervour in Rome in the first half of the seventeenth century, which saw the creation of the *Accademia dei lincei* in 1603 by Federico Cesi and the presence in Rome of key European intellectuals, makes the city come alive. Readers are treated to a riveting depiction of the city and the learned players involved in sharing and disputing ideas and circulating new knowledge about the Asian and American worlds. The protagonists are at once the Eternal City itself, at the time a key centre of exchange and mediation, and the botanists, physicians, mathematicians, philosophers, artists, and scientists who lived there. The result is a vivid glimpse into the dynamics that brought them together in the space of a few decades especially propitious for intellectual discovery and exchange.

Organized in six chapters, the book is dense and full of detail while at the same time highly readable and accessible to those who are not grounded in the history of science or medicine. Brevaglieri, already an accomplished scholar who has worked at length on the scientific and medical culture of seventeenth-century Rome, offers extensive archival research and a thorough command of the published works of the period. Contemporary scholarship provides us with a suggestive glimpse of a time when the Germanic and Hispanic worlds converged in Rome through the circulation of manuscripts, intellectuals, knowledge, and debate around natural science (*naturalia*) and botany. This

book is a welcome complement to the scholarship of Pamela H. Smith, Nancy G. Siraisi, Paula Findlen, Antonella Romano, Federica Favino, Silvia de Renzi, and Elisa Andretta whose recent interdisciplinary scholarship has added so much to our knowledge of early modern Italy, the history of collecting, art history, medicine, and science.

While evoking the places, people, and objects carefully presented to its readers, Brevaglieri's book sheds important light on the practice and craft of medicine, science, and the arts in the period under consideration. In her vivid portrait, men like Cesi, Giambattista della Porta, Galileo Galilei, Tommaso Campanella, Johann Faber, Caspar Schoppe, Leonardo Recchi, Fabio Colonna, Caravaggio, Johann Schreck, and Ferrante Imperato manage to cross paths, directly and indirectly in Naples and Rome, in their common pursuit of the "natural desire to know" (*natural desiderio di sapere*) (*passim*).

Throughout the book, Brevaglieri manages to meticulously reconstruct the behind-the-scenes labour of the many players involved in the publication of two works linked to the early sixteenth-century Roman context she so tellingly reconstructs. The genesis of the publication of the *Rerum medicarum Novae Hispania Thesaurus*, better known as the *Tesoro Messicano*, began in 1570 but was only published in 1651 thanks to the overlap of the efforts and scholarship of the individuals she considers. Likewise, the *Animalia Mexicana* by Johann Faber, published in 1628, was the fruit of the intellectual exchanges undertaken over decades. Both works, which were fundamental for providing early modern readers with knowledge of the American continent, had Rome as the backdrop for their presentation of the fruit of animated discussion and debate among a truly international cohort of intellectuals.

Brevaglieri's book will certainly interest scholars of early modern Rome, baroque art and science, the history of medicine, and intellectual networks in the early seventeenth century. A delight to read and always surprising, it is at once highly original yet grounded in previous scholarship that it enhances and enriches, inviting readers to immerse themselves in a context in which Rome was truly one of the great centres of scientific, geographical, artistic, and philosophical knowledge and culture.

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