

Giancarlo Abbamonte, Joana Barreto, Teresa D'Urson, Alessandra Perriccioli Saggese, and Francesco Senatore, eds. *La battaglia nel Rinascimento meridionale: Moduli narrativi tra parole e immagini*. I libri di Viella 126. Rome: Viella, 2011. 564 pp. + 48 b/w pls. €58. ISBN: 978-88-8334-491-6.

by **David Abulafia**

The title of this book of thirty-three essays has been devised with care. The book certainly reflects the lively research activity of scholars based in Naples and elsewhere who have advanced our understanding of fifteenth-century Southern Italy by leaps and bounds in the last couple of decades. Unlike a good many other publications about the Regno, this book has been published not by a small and obscure south Italian press, but by the highly regarded publishing house of Viella, based in Rome. And this volume deserves to be read widely, because it is not simply concerned with the mechanics of fighting; nor is it a book of essays about war as such – although it will be invaluable for those studying conflicts such as the French descent into Italy in 1494, its aim is not to address the broad strategic issues and their political context, which have long been the focus of study. The word *Rinascimento* is in the title for good reason: this is a book as much concerned with how writers and artists portrayed battles as with the major battles in late Angevin, Aragonese, and early Spanish Southern Italy. Thus the use by Pontano of classical treatises – *de re militari* – is addressed in an impressive study by Claudio Buongiovanni; Pontano's reliance on Caesar, Livy, Sallust, and Tacitus is ably brought out by Giuseppe Germano, whose focus is the important battle of Troia in 1462; and his debt to Virgil is examined by Marc Deramaix. Pontano, with his long career in politics and his outstanding literary reputation naturally figures prominently, but other courtiers in Aragonese Naples have their place: the influence of Cicero and Virgil on Bartolomeo Facio's description of the wars of Alfonso the Magnanimous in Africa is described in a fascinating article by one of the editors, Giancarlo Abbamonte. The volume extends as far as Machiavelli and Guicciardini, and their treatment of El Gran Capitán, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, in an article by Gennaro Maria Barbuto. There is also room for minor figures such as Porcelio de'Pandoni, very helpfully discussed by Antonietta Iacono.

Artistic evidence is by no means neglected. Nicolas Bock examines a series of tapestries, now

preserved in the cathedral of Zamora, that apparently belonged to King Ferrante and were sent as a present to his cousin and namesake, the King of Aragon, after Ferdinand of Aragon mediated a peace agreement between Ferrante and Pope Innocent VIII. The subject is the siege of Troy; it is a pity that these tapestries are not illustrated in the otherwise excellent collection of over a hundred photographs, as they are beautifully displayed nowadays. Other highly accomplished articles by art historians include a study by Teresa D'Urso on images of triumphal processions in illuminated manuscripts from the time of Ferrante and Alfonso II; and a demonstration by Bianca de Divitiis of the use of literary sources and letters by participants in the French invasion of 1494 as a means to better understand the architectural history of the Regno.

Naturally, there is also room for studies of what happened on the battlefield. Francesco Senatore, who has produced exemplary editions of the rich diplomatic correspondence between Aragonese Naples and Sforza Milan, is perfectly situated to use this material to show how descriptions of battles were dominated by stereotypes, so that these descriptions read almost as accounts of an elaborate game of something rather like chess. Other authors such as Bruno Figliuolo authoritatively address the evidence that there was a seismic shift in the character of warfare in Italy from 1494, as was, indeed, asserted by Guicciardini at the start of his history of Italy.

All this does not do justice to the many fine contributions by scholars such as Alessandra Perriccioli Saggese, who explores evidence from Angevin illuminated manuscripts, or Fulvio delle Donne, who examines humanistic accounts of the Aragonese attack on Marseilles in 1423. But what one takes away from this treasurehouse of fine essays is a sense that one must be constantly alert to the way classical authors and legends moulded the portrayal of battle in Renaissance southern Italy. *Settentrionalisti* too could learn a great deal from this book.

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