

Italian Frontispieces of the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries

Genoveffa Palumbo, *Le porte della storia: L'età moderna attraverso antiporte e frontespizi figurati*, Rome, Viella, 2012 (Studi e ricerche, Università di Roma Tre, 27), 586 pp., 47 b. & w. ill., €45.

by **Ilaria Andreoli**

Genoveffa Palumbo, an Italian religious historian specializing in seventeenth-century iconography and the history of women, set herself an ambitious goal in *Le porte della storia: L'età moderna attraverso antiporte e frontespizi figurati* (The gates of history: the modern age through figurative tide-pages and frontispieces).¹ Considering that tide-pages and frontispieces of books printed between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries are symbolic keys to the content of the tomes themselves, she presents 47 of them to illustrate the long and arduous process through which the representation of history became independent from religion. This leads her to evoke the relationship of European societies with their past, with early modern politics and with the birth of the concept of progress.

The first chapter deals with the Bible as a model for and source of all historical writing, but also as an enigmatic expression of divine knowledge. Palumbo shows that philology was a common tool of humanist history and biblical exegesis, and examines Protestant translations of the Bible in vernacular languages and Catholic interpretations of the Scriptures in education during the Counter-Reformation. Iconographic analysis is applied to the title-pages of the translation of the Bible into Italian by Antonio Brucioli (1532), to the first complete translation in German by Martin Luther with illustrations from the workshop of Lucas Cranach (1534), and to the 1567 *Bibell* and the 1607 *Adnotationes et Meditationes* by the Jesuit Hieronimus Nadal. On the one hand, reflection on the biblical text enhanced philological awareness and was instrumental, for example, in the conception of the *Acta Sanctorum*, the encyclopaedic compendium of the lives of Christian saints begun in the first decade of the seventeenth century. On the other hand, it provided meaning to sensational news from the new worlds, from the discovery of unknown flowers and animals to testimonies about societies ignorant of Christianity and European culture. The works of the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, such as *Arca Noë* of 1675 and *Turris Babel* of 1679, are a case in point.

Artists' biographies illustrated the new awareness of human history and the idea that fame attained by producing great works of art can provide a non-religious form of immortality (chapter two). From the tide-page of Giorgio Vasari's *Vite* (1550 and, mostly, 1568) to that of the *Monumenti antichi inediti* by Johann Joachim Winkelmann (1767), Palumbo thus comments on the development of a specific history of art and artistic styles. Meanwhile, the fact that monu-

ments were viewed as documents that reproductions can save from the injuries of time fostered an impressive output of iconographic manuals, such as Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1603, first illustrated edition), or the *Mondo simbolico* by Filippo Picinelli (1653, 1670), discussed in chapter three (fig. 172).

The use of antiquarian sources and the role of erudition in historical consciousness are addressed in chapter four. The struggle against the ravages of time is well exemplified by the tide-pages of the treatise on antiquities by Francois Perrier (1638; fig. 173), Giovanni Ciampini's *De sacris aedificis* (1693), or Francesco Bianchini's *Istoria universale* (1697), while modern archival science is hailed in the title-page of *De Re Diplomatica* by Jean Mabillon (1681). History also bears witness to national characteristics in the frontispieces of the works of Ludovico Antonio Muratori and is glorified as a 'new science' by Gian Battista Vico in his *Principi di Scienza Nuova* (1725).

Modern science proper appears in the tide-pages of *De humani corpora fabrica* by Andreas Vesalius (1543), *De motu cordis* by William Harvey (1628-61), the *Rudolphine Tables* of Johannes Kepler (1627), the *Saggiatore* (1623) and *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi* (1632) by Galileo, the *Novae Observationes* by Francesco Fontana (1646) and the treatise on fossils and crustaceans by Anton Lazzaro Moro (1740). Tellingly, 'Truth revealed by Reason' is celebrated in the frontispiece of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert's *Encyclopedie*.

An examination of the title-pages of religious censorship manuals of the seventeenth century opens chapter seven—the *Prattica dell'ufficio dell'Inquisizione* (1621) and the Indexes of Prohibited Books of 1632, 1640, 1665 and 1711 – before the author switches to politics with the famous title-page of Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651), the less well-known *Arca Noae*, a treatise on the four monarchies and the biblical genealogy by Georg Horn (1666), those of the French (1721) and Italian editions (1730) of Bossuet's *Politique* and the frontispiece of *Dei delitti e delle pene* by Cesare Beccaria (1756).

Finally, chapter eight deals with natural history and anthropology. Ancient science is confronted with new discoveries about animals and flowers in the title-pages of the *Rariorum plantarum historia* by Charles de l'Ecluse, 1601; the natural histories of Brazil (*Historia naturalis Brasiliae*, 1648) and the 'Indies' (*De Indiae utriusque re naturali et medica*, 1658) in which the naturalist Guglielmus Pisonis collected his observations; the *Hortus malabaricus*

(1678) by H. A. van Rhee and the *Pharmacopea Regia, Galenica et Chymica* (1684) of M. Charas. Another work, the *China illustrata* (1667) by Athanasius Kircher, signals the move towards anthropology and ethnography. At the end of the day History, unsurprisingly, defeats Time and the progress of humanity is celebrated on the title-page of the *Histoire d'Angleterre* by Paul Rapin (1723) and the frontispiece of the *Recherches sur les costumes* by Jean Charles Levacher (1790).

Le porte della storia does not purport to contribute to the history of the title-page or the evolution of the frontispiece, topics that the author considers 'technical' and belonging to the field of bibliography.² It is, rather, an essay on the social history of early modern culture that seeks to understand what title-pages can tell us about the content of the books. Despite Palumbo hoping that her work will open new paths for others to follow, one may doubt the effectiveness of her example, as she covers too much ground without deepening any subject, and, mostly, does not

have equal command of an exceedingly rich selection of books. One may also wonder about the choice of illustrations that associates well-known masterpieces with decidedly minor productions. Although the specialist, or print lover, will find here no information about the genesis of the examples chosen, about the artists and the workshops involved, and no consideration of style, the book is nevertheless interesting because of the wealth of information it provides and the quality of its bibliographic notes.

1. Palumbo's publications include: *Speculum peccatorum. Frammenti di storia nello specchio delle immagini tra Cinque e Seicento*, Naples, 1990; *L'esile traccia del nome. Storie di donne, storie di famiglia in un'isola del napoletano tra età moderna e contemporanea*, Naples, 2001.

2. For that one must still use S. Morison, *The Typographic Book, 1450-1935*, Chicago, 1963; F. Barberi, *Il frontespizio nel libro italiano del Quattrocento e del Cinquecento*, Milan, 1969; or, more recently, M. M. Smith, *The Title-page, its Early Development, 1460-1510*, London, 2000 and *La page de titre à la Renaissance*, edited by J.-F. Gilmont and A. Vanautgaerden, Turnholt, 2008.