

*Layered Wisdom: Early Modern Collections of Political Precepts.* Valentina Lepri. *La filosofia e il suo passato* 59. Padua: CLEUP, 2015. 230 pp. €18.

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In *Layered Wisdom* Valentina Lepri presents a broad and well-documented study of a theme that, even though not strange to many who study the period, has until now been treated in a fragmented way and restricted to a small number of authors. Lepri's object of study are the collections of political precepts taken from authors' personal experience and readings of classic and contemporary texts that appeared in various European countries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These books aimed at both condensing and epistemologically organizing knowledge dispersed in

many sources. As Lepri well summarizes: “Mingling and synthesizing the languages of law, statecraft, war and medicine, the authors of the collections of precepts were evidently all driven by the same aim: to transform political praxis into a precise science: the science of action” (141).

On running the path from thinkers like Francesco Guicciardini to the little-known Polish author Andrzej Maksymilian Fedro, Lepri shows that the literature analyzed was much more important for the conveyance of political ideas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than normally believed. Characters appearing in the pages of the book include the author and editor Francesco Sansovino, Giovan Francesco Lottini, Jacopo Corbinelli, and others who translated ancient texts into modern languages and condensed information dispersed from various authors and invested in the edition and publication of precept collections, thus contributing toward the bridge that links Renaissance and modern political thought.

One of the strong points of the book is an analysis of the role of Francesco Guicciardini’s writings in the preparation of the said compendiums. Chapter 4 draws attention to the presence of important direct and indirect references to the thought of Aristotle and Machiavelli (the latter sometimes surreptitiously) in writings from the second half of the sixteenth century. This view is shared by other scholars of this period. However, less conspicuous is that one of the most followed models of compendium writers has been the *Ricordi* and some parts of Guicciardini’s *Storia d’Italia*. The demonstration of the role of the Florentine thinkers is convincing and grounded on a rich set of references both in the way their texts became known and how they were decisive for authors like Sansovino, who believed that it was possible to produce and divulge a new type of political literature.

Although this is one of the strong points of Lepri’s study, it is lamentable that she did not dwell longer on the study of the contents of some elements of Guicciardini’s thinking that were appropriated by so many authors later on. It is true that the objective of the book is not to carry out a detailed analysis of the precepts. However, if we consider that the *Ricordi* were not written for dissemination, it might have been interesting to show how statements made by the Florentine thinker on themes as broad as human nature, fortune, ambition, and even experience could become maxims that often disagreed with the way Guicciardini saw the relationship between the universal and the private. Lepri herself demonstrates in chapter 2 how this study might be conducted when she analyzes the appropriation of the idea of *discrezione* by Sansovino in his book *Propositioni* (1583). Another gap in the book is the near lack of references to the *specula principis*. Considering their role in the diffusion of political ideas in the centuries before those studied by Lepri—and that their form served as a reference to Machiavelli, for example, when he wrote *The Prince*—a comparison of the two genres of political writing might have contributed to the understanding of the innovation that the appearance of the collections of political precepts represented.

Finally, considering the sources consulted and the novelty of their study as a set, it would have been desirable if Lepri had provided a final index of themes, and, most of all,

a bibliography, which would give the reader a vision of the entirety of the rich references presented in the notes.

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