

Bartolomeo Scala. *Essays and Dialogues*.

The I Tatti Renaissance Library 31. Trans. Renee Neu Watkins. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. xviii + 314 pp. index. bibl. \$29.95. ISBN: 978-0-674-02826-5.

As part of this notable series of humanistic texts a selection of the writings of Bartolomeo Scala (1430–97), the famous chancellor of Florence, is now edited with an Introduction by A. Brown, the author of the standard book on the subject, and more recently the editor of Scala's writings (*Humanistic and Political Writings* [Tempe, 1997], cited below as *W*).

The book collects six of Scala's orations and essays. As the most important I would like to point out the early epistle to Filippo Borromeo, "On the Philosophical Sects," the "Dialogue on Laws and Legal Judgments," and the late "Defence against the Detractors of Florence," an apology in 1496 for the republican regime inspired by Savonarola.

On the whole, Scala may be considered a typical representative of Florentine culture in the Laurentian era, with its somewhat elusive character. The essay on sects takes as its cue the Augustinian opposition between the variety of philosophical opinions and the one Christian Truth; nevertheless, the reader's curiosity is led toward the antiquarian notices on ancient doctrines, and special attention is paid to Lucretius's Epicurean poem (this is a point that Brown has recently emphasized). The dialogue on laws ends up with Bernardo Machiavelli's apology for the orthodox Bartolistic system; however, the most vivid section of the dialogue is Scala's praise of judgments immediately inspired by natural reason (or "equity"). Finally, the apology for the Savonarolan regime doesn't contradict, but rather confirms, the deeply-rooted Florentine principle of the separation of government and religion.

But in order to grasp Scala's actual beliefs one must turn to the twofold series (or *Centuriae*) of *Apologi*, possibly suggested by Leon Battista Alberti's work of the same name. It is in these short stories that Scala makes clear his main moral and political points. One in particular recurs: the desire to keep for his literary production a strictly private character. Scala warns his own "apologues," eager to get praise elsewhere: "Be quiet at home" (*domi manete*) (*W.*, 322). For such attitudes, Scala goes so far as to blame the new printing art, or *informatura ars*, according to his epistles to Poliziano (*W.*, 174).

The view Scala took of his own times (or rather, the coming times) was pessimistic. In one of his *Apologi*, Political Power (*vis*), Reason (*ratio*), and Authority (*auctoritas*) compete at length for preeminence. Finally, Authority wins and rules: "Post multos ergo labores et variarum rerum multiplicia discrimina, princeps regnat Auctoritas" (*W.*, 383).

This is a fine book, and the English translation is excellent; but the overlooking of so peculiar and subtle a work as the *Apologi* is disappointing. This reviewer's wish is that the I Tatti Library would find place for another volume, reserved this time for the most idiosyncratic of Scala's writings, such as the *Apologi*, with a choice of his private and humanistic letters.

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