

Étienne Dolet. *De officio legati, De immunitate legatorum, De legationibus Ioannis Langiachi Episcopi Lemovicensis.*

Les classiques de la pensée politique 23. Ed. and trans. David Amherdt. Geneva: Librairie Droz S.A., 2010. 158 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$32. ISBN: 978-2-600-01424-3.

With his 1546 execution for heresy, Lyon scholar-publisher Etienne Dolet (1508/09–1546) left behind a modest oeuvre — including what is believed to be the earliest printed treatise on diplomacy, his 1541 *De officio legati*. Dedicated to

Dolet's patron and former French ambassador to Venice, Jean de Langeac, the brief text comprises two prose books on the office and immunities of the ambassador and a 310-line dithyramb celebrating Langeac's diplomatic career. Subjected to *damnatio memoriae*, many of Dolet's publications were destroyed; his *De officio*, while not officially condemned, was neither widely disseminated nor reprinted, and today can be found in only a handful of libraries. David Amherdt's new scholarly edition thus does a valuable service by making available to French readers an ably-translated and carefully-commented bilingual version of this rare text.

The text's literary value is complemented by its significance for students of Renaissance diplomacy and political culture. As historians have revised the concept of the early modern state and its development, new attention has been devoted to treatises such as Dolet's and their insights into humanist ideals of statecraft. However, relatively few early modern treatises on the ambassador have been translated into modern languages or rigorously edited. While an English translation of the first two parts of *De officio* was published in the *American Journal of International Law* in 1933, Dolet's text is perhaps best-known through skeletal extracts in legal historian Vladimir Hrabar's compilation *De Legati et Legationibus Tractatus Varii* (1905). Hrabar's schematic rendering has often led the text to be read genealogically, divorced from its early sixteenth-century humanist context.

Though Amherdt assumes his readers' familiarity with Dolet's colorful career, his introduction situates the treatise both within Dolet's patronage relationships as well as within the broader genre of works *de legato*. Amherdt ably breaks the text into its component parts, analyzing each in turn. The first, *De officio legati*, catalogues the external and moral qualities an ambassador should display. The principal function of Dolet's ambassador is to execute his instructions prudently, faithfully, and eloquently, so as to uphold and augment his master's honor and reputation. Dolet countenances the use of espionage and what might be termed strategic largesse in the service of this goal. This book is directed to princes, for whom the selection of a suitable ambassador had become an important marker of political acumen. In good humanist style, therefore, prudence — a virtue uniting, as Amherdt notes, practice with theory — plays a central role. Ironically, contemporaries ascribed to Dolet's patron, Langeac, few of the virtues of Dolet's ideal ambassador.

Dolet drew not only on his experience as secretary to Langeac's Venetian embassy from 1528 to 1529, but also on his excellent humanist education. Dolet was a noted Ciceronian, and *De officio* reflects his classicizing agenda — most prominently in his choice of the term legate instead of the vulgar ambassador, but also in his subsequent *De immunitate legatorum*. Dolet introduces this second book with a mocking reversal of traditional authorial modesty, and continues by criticizing conventional treatments of diplomatic immunities. While Amherdt describes the body of *De immunitate* as “nothing but a string of often-literal citations from antique authors” (28) compiled to extol classical virtues and Dolet's erudition, this curious text could also be read as a critique of contemporary diplomatic prescription and practice.

Far from critique, Dolet's third book fulsomely celebrates the diplomatic career of his patron, Jean de Langeac. It is, as Amherdt remarks, a mediocre poem and poor source for reconstructing Langeac's many missions. Nonetheless, such poetry was relatively common in early modern diplomatic circles, and forms a rarely tapped resource for examining diplomatic patronage. In persevering through this oft-neglected verse, Amherdt makes an important example of such poetry accessible to wider academic audiences.

Amherdt brings to *De officio* a careful eye for Dolet's classicizing inclinations and borrowings. He has throughout modernized spelling, abbreviations, punctuation, and Dolet's execrable pagination; and has added thematic headings in the French translation. Amherdt's edition is particularly noteworthy for presenting the Latin and French on facing pages, enabling a philological as well as political appreciation of Dolet's text. This edition will surely be of interest to students of diplomacy, political culture, international law, humanism, and French literature and culture.

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