

same time vital to elucidate the references and contexts. Although students may balk at the number of letters, they offer a unique opening onto the Italian Renaissance in ways that are not possible with other kinds of texts. *Selected Letters* is a splendid achievement that will enable further study of Isabella d'Este, permitting a sustained study of a complex, strong character not fully seen before.

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*Al crocevia della storia: Poesia, religione e politica in Vittoria Colonna.*

Maria Serena Sapegno, ed.

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Vittoria Colonna, the Marquise of Pescara, was one of the leading exponents of sixteenth-century Italian poetry and still sparks the interest of critics and academics, as can be seen by a steady stream of studies and editorial initiatives, some of them quite recent (to name one, *A Companion to Vittoria Colonna*, ed. Abigail Brundin, Tatiana Crivelli, and Maria Serena Sapegno [2016], whose publication practically coincides with that of the volume under review).

The reason for this renewed interest surely lies in the multitude of fields in which the Marquise of Pescara played an important role at a crucial time in European history such as the first half of the sixteenth century. Moreover, there are still unresolved questions as to several long-standing issues of a strictly philological nature, such as those concerning the edition of Colonna's correspondence and private papers, as well as of a historical nature, given the lack of a proper biography due to spotty documentation. In addition, Vittoria Colonna has attracted scholars' attention in research areas that are comparatively more recent, such as the history of gender: that is, the developments in publishing and printing in what was even at that time exhibiting the characteristics of a mass market (see Tatiana Crivelli, "Godere di cattiva stampa: Spunti per una rilettura della tradizione editoriale delle rime di Vittoria Colonna"), one that gradually absorbed literature by women writers, often of a devotional nature. These were all elements that were quite important to an author who, as Abigail Brundin shows (in "Poesia come devozione: Leggere le rime di Vittoria Colonna"), paid close attention to her readers' inclinations.

This volume, edited by Maria Serena Sapegno, is a collection of articles by scholars who have examined the most controversial issues connected with Vittoria Colonna, with a focus on elements that may prove useful in presenting a broad canvas of her as-yet-unwritten biography. Colonna was an important representative of the Roman aristocracy and played an active role in the politics of her day. She served as a mediator between Pope Paul III, her brother Ascanio, and Emperor Charles V, all involved in

an episode that Paolo Prodi considers a turning point in the relations between the papacy and the Roman nobility. In this regard, Marina D'Amelia devotes a detailed study of the pains Colonna took managing her own family's estates (in "L'orgoglio delle origini: Prestigio e interessi familiari in Vittoria Colonna"). Moreover, the analysis of Colonna's personality is problematic, given that, in a break with the traditional interpretation, Ramie Targoff claims that the death of her husband Ferrante was not only a watershed event in her life, but strongly influenced her later desire to take monastic vows, which would only be thwarted when Pope Clement VII forbade her from doing so, a stand taken less overtly by Pope Paul III later on ("La volontà segreta di Vittoria Colonna: Una lettera smarrita a Clemente VII").

The collection of articles attests to the critics' ongoing interest in the marquise's religious and poetic inclinations. While the classical education she received in her youth would prevail at least until Ferrante's death, a wealth of data in this volume shows that the poet later acquired a grounding in theology, one that would satisfy her mystical inclinations and kindle her interest in certain aspects of the Protestant Reformation. As is well known, in fact, Colonna was in close contact with Bernardino Ochino and Reginald Pole and was suspected of embracing the Valdesian movement and the doctrine of the justification by faith, the latter of which, however, was only condemned by the Council of Trent ten days after Colonna's death, as Gigliola Fragnito points out. In her study, Fragnito provides three observations that shed light on this unexpected development. First of all, the exact terms of Colonna's adherence to the controversial doctrine are unknown. Moreover, her orientation was not the result, as is often claimed, of the influence of Ochino, Pole, or Valdès alone; it can be traced back at least in part to ideas she had absorbed in the humanistic milieu in Naples, as I myself have previously suggested. The Neapolitan intellectuals were imbued with Neoplatonism and had been exposed to "pre-Reformation" authors in the circle of Lefèbvre d'Étaples, whose stay in Naples had been arranged by Jacopo Sannazaro on his return from France ("Per lungo e dubbioso sentero": L'itinerario spirituale di Vittoria Colonna).

Indeed, Colonna's own position, marked by a scant sensibility to the cult of the saints and the Virgin Mary, to whom she did not commend her soul on point of death, never emerged in her writings directed at persons who fell outside of elite intellectual circles. To such people she offered herself as a model of piety, in the terms described by Virginia Cox ("Vittoria Colonna e l'esemplarità") and Adriana Chemello ("Il più bel lume di questo mondo": Vittoria Colonna e il suo tempo"). This would seem to suggest another interesting connection between a standard theme in studies on Vittoria Colonna—that is, her presumed sympathies for the Reformation—and a more recent focus of research: that of her social interactions in her own milieu.

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