

De la raison d'État (1589–1598). Giovanni Botero.

Ed. and trans. Pierre Benedittini and Romain Descendre. Bibliothèque de Philosophie. Paris: Gallimard, 2014. 422 pp. €32.

While it is hard to forget G. R. Elton's conclusions concerning "the fairly crass amorality of the priest Botero" (1544–1617), it is also hard to dismiss Botero's influence on post-Tridentine European political discourse. For example, one must carefully distinguish between the "reason of state" that Botero set forth in his *Della ragion di stato* (1589) and the "reason of state," or "raison d'État," that developed in the generation following Botero's, under the leadership of such notable international scoundrels as Cardinal Richelieu (1585–1642). For Botero, "reason of state," contrary to earlier ideas espoused by Machiavelli and Guicciardini, was one where princely politics, in a pseudo-Aristotelian sense, ought to strive to retain moral foundations, not simply the appearances of morality. One might say, then, that Botero's vision of virtuous princely rule is bookended by the harsh and sometimes cynical realism of his Florentine predecessors and their later French counterparts. It would be incorrect, though, to conclude that Botero was somehow naïve. His political thought was forged in the cauldron of the French Wars of Religion, and as a Jesuit, he could not abide a religion or Christian sect other than the Roman Catholic faith. Botero's ideal state was, then, one with a unified religion that left little room for minority belief systems. In order for a prince or king to create and to rule such a *stato*, it was necessary at times for him, as Robert Bireley noted, "to exceed the limits of truth as long as he remained within the limits of verisimilitude. . . . But appearance was never enough; enduring reputation had to be founded in reality."

Benedittini and Descendre's finely edited and translated French edition of Botero's treatise is a part of the intellectual and historical tradition shared by Bireley. Those with francophone research specialties will find Descendre's concise definitions of *stato*, as used by Machiavelli and Botero, to be of particular interest: in *The Prince*, "*stato* may indicate personal power, the rank of an individual, a territory, or property, as well as a political institution or geopolitical entity acting on a diplomatic or military plan." But with Botero, "the definition of the word [*stato*] has the effect of stabilizing its meaning in the much larger [political and economic] framework of an enterprise for codifying governance practices. Deciphering *The Reason of State* comes down to trying to understand the [high] stakes of this definition, because while it characterizes its

purpose in a very noticeable gap in the legal-political tradition, it also sums up a large part of the significance of the book" (17).

Despite these differences, it would nevertheless be a mistake to assume that Botero was modern, or more modern than Machiavelli. He was certainly different from Machiavelli, and, in many respects, Botero embodied the things that Machiavelli (and Guicciardini) intensely disliked about the Roman Church's continuous interference in politics; but he wasn't modern. If anything, Botero's "reason of state" is more closely related to medieval Scholasticism than to the seeds of modernity, which, like it or not, are found more presciently in Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and *Discorsi*. Furthermore, in refuting Machiavelli's conceptual framework for the acquisition and maintenance of power, devoid of traditional morality, which Botero does forcefully in his book's dedication (63), he began a long tradition of anti-Machiavellian and, dare one suggest, anti-Renaissance rhetoric. Importantly though, he did this, as Maurizio Viroli and others have pointed out, in print, not in secret missives or narrowly distributed manuscripts.

Benedittini and Descendre's edition of Botero's *De la raison d'État*, based upon four Italian print editions (1589, 1590, 1596, and 1598), is the first French translation of the work since 1599, and is also first to record textual modifications and suppressions. They chose the 1598 Venetian edition as their base text and made modifications to it when they found earlier editions to be more helpful. Benedittini and Descendre have produced a fine piece of scholarship that is a genuinely new contribution to French and Renaissance historiography. That a book that was so influential in France had to wait over 400 years for a second editorial treatment is rather astounding. At least the wait was worth it. Readers of this edition will find helpful annotations at the foot of each page. These provide very useful bibliographical materials. Mixed together with the footnotes, one will also find the critical apparatus, which is included in the Italian original. Cost almost certainly prohibited a two-volume edition, but a new Italian critical edition with the French translation on facing pages would have been delightful and it certainly would have expanded the editors' audience. As it stands, in the hands of the right audience, this edition will surely spark future studies.

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