

REVIEWS

Epistolarum Iuveniliū Libri Octo Petri Candidi Decembrii. Federico Petrucci, ed.

Premio Tesi Dottorato 33. Florence: Firenze University Press, 2013. 510 pp. €15.90.

This volume of the earliest correspondence of the Milanese humanist Pietro Candido Decembrio covers the years 1423–32, when Decembrio was active as a secretary in the court of Filippo Maria Visconti. Decembrio's epistolary production has hitherto only been available in print through the very limited publication of Zaccaria (in a 1952 number of *Rinascimento*) and scattered individual letters edited by Gabotto, Hankins, Rutherford, Speyer, and Bianca. His letter collection survives in two manuscripts and appears to have been carefully arranged by him into three volumes; the volume under review edits fifty-eight letters comprising the first volume, forty of which, along with a prefatory letter, are by Decembrio himself (the remaining letters are by his correspondents). These letters demonstrate Decembrio's high profile in the first decades of the century: there are letters to the Florentines Bruni and Niccoli, Guarino, Loschi, Antonio da Rho, Pope Martin V, and Filippo Visconti; to a number of important Genoese courtiers and diplomats; and an epistolary invective written against his humanist rival Panormita. Taken together, the collection paints a portrait of a humanist early in his career engaged in a number of typical humanist literary endeavors but also pursuing some more ambitious and innovative investigations in textual and philological criticism.

A substantial number of letters exercise Decembrio's capacity as a writer of *consolationes* for family members of his correspondents; others more formally console important political figures on behalf of the Visconti court. Two letters constitute works of praise for condottieri, the first of which (2.1, addressed to Feltrino Boiardo on Braccio di Montone) takes up the interesting theme of heroic losers; another, to Loschi, opines on the style and sensibility of Petrarch, with ambivalent results; and a long letter written to Filippo Visconti on some possible transformations that might improve the official insignia of the Visconti court evokes the fascinating courtly contexts in which political imagery was debated and selected in a fifteenth-century courtly regime. Students of the history of classical scholarship will be interested in letters 1.5 (on Caesar's authorship of the *Commentarii*), 3.10 (on a spurious letter supposed to have been written by Cornelius Nepos), and 6.1 (in which Decembrio, examining Seneca's first letter to Lucilius, weighs in alongside earlier humanists — Salutati, Barzizza — on the possible meaning of the phrase "aliud agere," taking it to mean "living contrary to one's nature"). Finally, another letter (4.8, to Niccoli) looks at the art of being a secretary — an early, though brief anticipation of the courtier literature of several generations in the future.

Petrucci's edition of the letters will be quite useful to those engaged in research on the Visconti court. The bibliography is extensive; the introductions to individual letters identify figures, some of whom are quite obscure, either active in the ambit of Milan or in other cities like Genoa under its rule during this period; and the topics of individual letters are handled well in relation to relevant genres (consolation, invective, etc.). Regrettably, the edition is rife with typographical errors in both the Latin and the Italian — I stopped counting at fifty. Troubling as well are some incoherent passages in the Latin, either the result of faulty transcription or failure to make necessary emendations. Used with caution, Petrucci's edition, available in an inexpensive paperback format, will be convenient for those who are students of Quattrocento humanism or of Milanese political and social history under the Visconti.

W. SCOTT BLANCHARD, *Misericordia University*