

*Zibaldone*. Giovanni di Pagolo Rucellai.

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Giovanni Rucellai — a crucial, many-sided, and controversial figure of Quattrocento Florence — became a subject of historical fascination and opposing viewpoints by eminent Renaissance scholars from the nineteenth century onward. To explain these passionate and contrasting reactions, suffice it to recall that Rucellai had strong ties, including kinship, with such prominent Florentines as Palla Strozzi and Cosimo de' Medici. This feature is duly emphasized by Anthony Molho in his preface to Gabriella Battista's edition of *Zibaldone*, a lengthy, complex text that is now finally available in its

entirety. As a starting point, Molho duly cites Alessandro Perosa's seminal anthology of passages from Rucellai's book. Published in 1960 as the first part of a two-volume project launched under the aegis of the Warburg Institute and titled *Lo Zibaldone Quaresimale di Giovanni Rucellai. Pagine scelte*, Perosa's selection proved a pioneering contribution to the knowledge of the Italian Renaissance.

As Perosa explained in the introduction to his anthology, the rationale behind his selection of excerpts was to make available from the *Zibaldone* the most useful passages to outline Rucellai's personality. Though utterly plausible, Perosa's method had several shortcomings, starting with the versatile, fascinating, yet ultimately elusive personality of this Florentine merchant, statesman, and art patron. In this regard, it is worth referring to two of those opposite interpretations that Molho records in his preface to this volume. An often-quoted portrait of Rucellai is the one offered by the mid-nineteenth-century American amateur historian and traveler James Jackson Jarves. In his *Italian Rambles: Studies of Life and Manners in New and Old Italy* (1883), Jarves depicted the author of the *Zibaldone* as "the ideal Florentine, the complete type of enterprising, sagacious, level headed citizen, respectful, successful and esteemed in every relation of life, pious without bigotry, acquisitive without stinginess, thrifty yet munificent." Around the same time, the Italian historian and genealogist Luigi Passerini expressed a different judgement. In his eyes, Rucellai stood out as a harbinger of Guicciardini's despicable "particulare" (that is, a thoroughly self-serving, hypocritical strategist), as viewed by another famous Italian scholar of the time, Giovanni De Sanctis. Many thus started considering Rucellai an unreliable, double-faced operator who betrayed his father-in-law, Palla Strozzi, to ingratiate himself with Cosimo de' Medici, whose granddaughter Nannina eventually married Rucellai's son Bernardo in 1466.

The same contrasting views found their way into the sequel to Perosa's 1960 anthology, *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone: A Florentine Patrician and his Palace*, which appeared in 1981. The title was appropriate since the essays by F. W. Kent, Alessandro Perosa, Brenda Preyer, and Roberto Salvini (with an introduction by Nicolai Rubinstein) touched on many different aspects of Rucellai's life, including his art patronage and the beautiful palace he commissioned from Leon Battista Alberti. As such, this volume made a fundamental contribution to the knowledge of Rucellai. The only major piece still lacking to complete the picture was the edition of his immense *Zibaldone*. Gabriella Battista started work on this difficult task some twenty years ago, as she recalls in her long, detailed introduction, which not only illuminates the main features of Rucellai's personality, but also serves as an updated study of the so-called *libri di famiglia* from the Italian Renaissance. Battista provided a foretaste of her research on Rucellai's *Zibaldone* in a conference held at Palazzo Rucellai in October 2008. In her essay ("Giovanni Rucellai e il suo Zibaldone," *Letteratura e Arte* 9 [2011]), Battista shared some of her important findings on this book. She has now made available the whole text in an excellent edition, provided with clear and precise indexes of names and topics. The over 600 pages of this volume report in its entirety Rucellai's reflections on such diverse subjects as politics, business, religion, history, family, morals, science,

liturgy, and philosophy, structured around a wealth of sources (classical, medieval, and Renaissance) that Rucellai transcribed for himself and, in most cases, dictated from 1457 to the end of his life.

The *Zibaldone* is, as the author himself calls it on the opening page, “una insalata di più herbe” (“a salad of many herbs”). It is fortunate for Renaissance scholars that this dish has finally been served to satisfaction.

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