

Public Magnificence and Private Display

Giovanni Pontano's De splendore (1498) and the Domestic Arts

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This article examines a treatise on the concept of Splendour from the late fifteenth century. Written by the Naples-based humanist, Giovanni Pontano, it deals with the domestic display of wealth. Based on Aristotelian models, the treatise opened up new opportunities for differentiating private forms of expenditure, such as the purchase of gems, vases and tableware from the public forms that were associated with the virtue of Magnificence, such as architectural patronage. This division, the article argues, was a rhetorical exercise based on literary models. It was not a description of actual practice or a manual of behaviour. Nonetheless, it provided a way of formulating modes of display that allowed the new class of wealthy administrators in the Kingdom of Naples to express their elite status without suggesting that they belonged to the royal aristocracy.

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In January 1483, a German priest, Felix Schmidt, visited the Venetian island of Murano in the company of compatriots who were purchasing large quantities of the island's renowned glass. Although he was there to visit his fellow monks, he was sufficiently intrigued by the difficulties of shipping these fragile wares to comment on their value in the pilgrim's guide that he was compiling.¹ In his description he argued that, given the technical difficulties and the skill involved in their manufacture, the Murano glass vases should be equated with similar objects formed from more precious materials. He described 'such hardworking craftsmen, who from the fragile materials make such elegant vases that gold or silver ones or vases adorned with precious stones hardly surpass them, and if they were solid, like metal vases their price would be higher than gold.'²

An anecdote that followed later in the text suggested that this view was not without its difficulties. Schmidt recounted an earlier episode when the

Venetian senate had presented the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III with glassware. The emperor had admired the work for its painstaking workmanship, 'artificium industrium'. But he had then allowed the vases to slip between his fingers, remarking ruefully that gold and silver had certain clear advantages over glass for their 'broken shards are still useful.'³ In this particular analogy, it was clear that no amount of technical sophistication could match bullion's immediate monetary value.

Felix Schmidt's observations touched on a crucial late-fifteenth-century debate concerning the definition of material and cultural value, one that has come to the forefront of discussions on Renaissance consumption.⁴ In a discussion of gift-giving written at about the same time, the Neapolitan court humanist and secretary, Giovanni Pontano, attempted to theorize the distinction between an appreciation of the difference between manufacture and materials:

. . . sometimes art makes a gift acceptable. There was nothing that [the King of Naples] Alfonso kept with such pleasure as a picture by the painter Giovanni [Jan van Eyck]. There are some that prefer the tiniest little vase of that material which they call porcelain to vases of silver and of gold even though the latter are of higher cost. It does happen occasionally that the excellence of the gift is not judged so much by its cost, as by its beauty, its rarity and its elegance.⁵

The notion that ‘sometimes art makes a gift acceptable’ was an important topos in Quattrocento debates concerning luxury goods and their display; at issue was the wider question of how the additional qualities offered by technical sophistication and artistic ingenuity should be defined, measured and appreciated. In a society where producer and purchaser carefully priced objects of every form and status, the basis for determining such value could be crucial.

The theoretical terms that provided the parameters for discussing these costs are of particular concern to historians of the so-called decorative arts, because, unlike paintings, items such as textiles, metalwork and ceramics provoked particularly acute anxieties over sinful luxury and inappropriate expenditure. These worries were initially connected with moral questions concerning vanity and worldly ambitions, issues that provided the focus for attacks throughout the fifteenth century by charismatic preachers such as St Bernardino of Siena and Fra Girolamo Savonarola.⁶ With the refashioning of Aristotelian theories on the virtue of Magnificence, rebuttals of these moralist critiques were already available in the mid-fourteenth century. These were more widely disseminated in the fifteenth-century *laudatiae* for patrons such as Cosimo dei Medici or Ercole d’Este.⁷ But in these texts, the primary concern was architecture. Buildings were the focus for magnificence, other forms of patronage were secondary. It was not until the late Quattrocento, when Giovanni Pontano produced the text from which the above passage was taken that the debate was reinvigorated. His treatises on magnificence and splendour were part of a series of five short texts on the so-called ‘social virtues’. They did not merely repeat or rework Aristotle’s views on the value of lavish expenditure for the common good.⁸ Instead, they extended the argument to include a more nuanced exploration of the means of spending private wealth for private means. This shift subtly altered the terms of the debate over luxury goods,

opening the way to sharper distinctions that set those goods produced for the domestic setting in opposition to those produced for the public civic arena. This, I will argue, was not a direct reflection of an increasing privatization of contemporary space and behaviour but a consequence of the literary and philosophical formulae that Pontano chose to adopt.

The author

Giovanni Pontano, who used a Latin adaptation of his name, Joannis Jovanus Pontanus, is now best known to literary specialists for the humanist prose and poetry that he produced within the context of a long and varied political career.⁹ Born in Perugia in the late 1420s, he was educated along Aristotelian lines, studying grammar, logic and philosophy. During this period he produced an early essay that disputed the value of matrimony and private property, a rhetorical piece constructed as much for its argumentative tone as for its author’s genuine beliefs.¹⁰

Pontano arrived in Florence some time between 1447 and 1448. There he was introduced to the humanist Antonio Beccadelli, known as il Panormita. Through the latter’s assistance, he was eventually invited to join the secretariat of King Alfonso I of Aragon and Naples, where his literary and administrative career flourished. His reputation was already secure by 1457, when he was included in Bartolomeo Fazio’s *Lives of Illustrious Men* for the quality of his Latin prose and poetry.¹¹ He became a royal counsellor around 1462 and leader of the King’s *Sommaria*, the financial body or court dealing with feudal dues in the 1480s. Pontano was also employed as chief secretary, first to the Duke of Calabria’s wife, Ippolita Maria Sforza, then to the Duke himself, and finally to Alfonso I’s successor, King Ferrante (the Duke of Calabria’s father).¹²

There were numerous political changes and military upheavals during Pontano’s time of service, including internal rebellions and external warfare against other Italian rulers as well as against Ottoman invaders.¹³ Like other humanist secretaries in royal service, Pontano often found himself travelling or on the battlefield with his master, a lifestyle that left limited opportunities for writing, but allowed for considerable intimacy and contact amongst the group of loyal royal servants.

Travel and warfare did not, however, diminish Pontano's wider intellectual influence. During his almost fifty years of service, he became the leader of Naples's literary academy, succeeding il Panormita in 1471. While the majority of his works were only published after his retirement in 1495, he regularly circulated his manuscripts amongst his associates during his political career. These writings touched on diverse moral and ethical topics such as courage, obedience and prudence. There were also lengthy epics on astrology and astronomy such as the *Urania* and the *De rebus coelestibus*.¹⁴ Despite, or perhaps because of, his sensitive court position, contemporary political issues were rarely at the forefront of his writing, with one exception. While tutor to Alfonso, Duke of Calabria (the future Alfonso II) in 1468, he composed a short treatise on rulership, *De principe*, a text closely based on Xenophon's, *Cyropedia* (a copy of which was in Pontano's own library).¹⁵ This made no reference to theoretical concepts such as magnificence or splendour but did focus on issues such as dress and posture, providing generic recommendations concerning moderation and decorum. Thus the young prince was to avoid any gestures or movements that might be deemed rustic or inept and to wear appropriately masculine garb.¹⁶

Pontano's more pointed political advice appears in his historical writings on the Neapolitan wars of succession where he held up the figure of the first Aragonese King of Naples, Alfonso I, for emulation. During his career, Pontano had followed Alfonso's son Ferrante and, above all, his grandson Alfonso II with great loyalty. With the invasion of the French armies in February 1495, however, Pontano declined to accompany his new master, the young Ferrandino, into exile in Ischia. Instead, he remained behind in Naples, offering the keys of the fortress of Castel Capuano to the invader, the King of France, Charles VIII, and reciting an oration of welcome on behalf of his adopted town.¹⁷ When the Aragonese retook Naples a few months later, a semi-disgraced Pontano slipped into retirement. From his villa outside the city, he watched the eventual collapse of the dynasty as it was absorbed into the expanding Iberian kingdom of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabelle of Castille.

This enforced retirement, like that of Machiavelli a few decades later, gave Pontano the time to refocus his energies on his writings and on preserving his own reputation. Even with his active involvement in

warfare and politics during the 1470s and 1480s, he had always been careful to cultivate a self-image as a scholar, writer and statesman in the classical tradition. Numerous contemporary and posthumous portraits produced during his lifetime survive to reinforce this impression. These range from the bronze medals issued to celebrate the publication of his poetry, to a full-size bronze bust produced by Adriano Fiorentino. The latter may relate to an image that the Duke of Calabria was supposed to have commissioned in honour of his tutor and secretary.¹⁸ It shows Pontano as a mature man in a Roman toga, serious and committed both to the classical world and to his contemporary duties.

Yet despite his interest in self-promotion, Pontano had been slow to take advantage of the newest means of disseminating his works. Although a printing press was first established in Naples in the early 1470s, he seems to have shown little interest in this technology.¹⁹ He first began publishing his writings in a limited fashion in the late 1480s; it was not until 1498, when the destiny of the Pontano's patron, the King of Naples, was clearly doomed, that he permitted two Northern printers, resident in Naples, Johann Tresser and Martino da Amsterdam, to publish a single-volume edition of the five treatises referred to above.

Probably begun in the 1460s and written over many decades, the five books were closely interwoven. Covering liberality, charity, magnificence, splendour and hospitality, they were all formulated on essentially Aristotelian lines with a common emphasis on the issue of moral expenditure. Following Aristotle, Pontano stressed that every object and activity had a final perfect end; each virtue under discussion had a desired mean between deficiency and excess. Thus liberality stood between avarice and extravagance; hospitality between lack of conviviality and excessive service; magnificence between meanness and vainglory; and splendour between baseness or vulgarity and an over-refined luxuriousness.

Most of these topics were well-worn themes for fifteenth-century humanists. The concept of liberality had frequently been exercised by writers anxious to encourage generous gift-giving on the part of their patrons while that of magnificence, first outlined in Aristotle's Nichomachean ethics, had, as we have seen, been extensively reworked by Italian writers since the mid-fourteenth century.²⁰ Book Four of the

Ethics was also the basis for Pontano's own treatise on magnificence and, to a certain degree, for his discussion of its cognate virtue, splendour. In considering the division between magnificence and splendour, it is worth stressing that Aristotelian magnificence had made no such distinction between the public and private forms of the virtue. In the *Nicomachean ethics*, for example, Aristotle had argued:

A magnificent man will also furnish his house suitably to his wealth (for even a house is a sort of public ornament), and will spend by preference on those works that are lasting (for these are the most beautiful) and in every class of things he will spend what is becoming.²¹

Writers such as the fourteenth-century Lombard, Galvanno Fiamma, had continued in this tradition, praising princes for their palaces as well as for their public services.²² Indeed, the Florentine prelate Timeoteo Maffei's mid-fifteenth-century praise of Medicean expenditure centred on the argument that a magnificent home brought glory to the city as well as to the individual.²³ An equally traditional fifteenth-century treatise on rulership produced in Naples by Giannino Maio repeated the Aristotelian defence of expensive princely display designed to impress and control the populace.²⁴

While Pontano is often considered a rather conventional neo-Aristotelian writer, however, his approach proved very different. His greatest innovation was to multiply and fragment Aristotle's single category of *Magnificentia*. Instead of a single concept that embraced all forms of display, he divided it between the public and the private, and in doing so created a new form of praise for conspicuous consumption. This was in keeping with a binary approach that can be found in much of his other writings where divisions between the private and public aspects of a single virtue are often emphasized. *On Fortitude*, for example, was divided between public fortitude and the private forbearance of domestic grief.²⁵ The treatise, *On Liberality*, emphasized forms of public liberality such as the provision of hospitals as opposed to the private support given to friends and relations.²⁶

Pontano was aware that his new divisions were unusual and was careful to justify his innovation. *De splendore* includes a clear defence and a rationale for his categorization:

It is appropriate to join splendour to magnificence, because they both consist of great expense and have a common matter, that is money. But magnificence derives its name from the concept of grandeur and concerns building, spectacle and gifts, while splendour is primarily concerned with the ornament of the household, the care of the person and with furnishings . . . Furthermore, magnificence reveals itself more in public works and in those that are destined for a longer life, while splendour is more concerned with private matters and does not despise something for being of short duration or small.²⁷

It is interesting to note that in making his distinctions Pontano implicitly assumed that splendour and magnificence were both masculine virtues. There was no hint that these domestic interiors should fall under female control; it is taken as a given that household furnishings, clothing and jewellery are as much a focus of male attention as civic responsibilities.

The shift had some immediate consequences. In *De splendore*, a new range of objects came under closer scrutiny. Knives, goblets, tapestries and caskets, ignored in discussions on magnificence, could all be incorporated into a discussion of splendour. It is, however, important to stress that this shift was not the author's primary intention. Pontano did not set out to define a category known as 'the decorative arts'. Nor did he intend to offer prescriptive advice on how to furnish one's home. He was more concerned to devise a new format for discussing a well-worn topic, one that would keep his reader's attention and demonstrate his versatility in Aristotelian philosophical categorizations. Thus we should be wary of reading the treatise as a description of late-fifteenth-century social practice; the need for literary novelty may explain more about its construction than any desire to describe contemporary norms. Yet in providing a framework for praising the private domestic interior, Pontano opened up new possibilities and new expectations for his readers.

The text

De splendore is a relatively short Latin text divided into eight sections. Like the other treatises in the series, it begins with a dedication to a contemporary figure. It then moves into a neo-Aristotelian exploration of the excesses and defects of Splendour, as the only method of achieving its true nature was to avoid its extremes. In this scheme, Splendour became the mean between

baseness or vulgarity, 'sorditas', and over-refined or inappropriate forms of expenditure. Paying the appropriate amount without demur, neither too much nor too little, was an important criterion in determining who was genuinely splendid. Thus the base or vulgar man was one who wished to spend as little as possible, potentially disguising this fault by purchasing false goods, fakes that would then be passed off as originals. In contrast, the splendid man had to be prepared to pay an appropriate sum in order to ensure that his goods were copious, rare and elegant. This did not always require great wealth and even a figure of modest means could, with care, afford to be splendid.

In the third section, Pontano described the household goods of such a character in some detail:

We call furnishings, *supelectilem*, all domestic objects, such as vases, plates, linen, divans and other objects of this type without which it would not be possible to live pleasantly. Although men acquire these things for use and comfort, it is the obligation of the splendid man to regard not only use and comfort but to acquire as many of these objects as possible in such a way that friends and the knowledgeable, when it is necessary, can easily avail themselves of them, and to have them of the most excellent quality, with some superiority that is due either to the artistry, or to the material, or to both. The base man and the splendid man both use a knife at table. The difference between them is this. The knife of the first is sweaty and has a horn handle; the knife of the other man is polished and has a handle made of some noble material that has been worked with an artist's mastery.²⁸

He would then find himself praised if, in addition to the above, he added variety in:

the work, the artistry and the material of a series of objects of the same category. It is not necessary, indeed, that there should be many cups resplendent on the dresser, but these should be of various types. Some should be in gold, silver and porcelain; and they should be of different forms, some as chalices, some as bowls for mixing wine, some in the form of a jug, or as plates with long or short handles. Of these some should seem to be acquired for use and for ornament, and others for ornament and elegance alone. Some should be made precious by their cost and size, others exclusively by the refinement and rarity which comes either from the hand of the artist or from some other reason.²⁹

While these passages may have been designed as a model for a gentleman's collection of metalware and

ceramics, there was, again, a literary as well as a practical bias to these conceits. Humanist readers of *De splendore* would have immediately recognized the parallels with Quintillian and Cicero's injunctions to create appropriate speeches using copiousness and a variety of motifs.³⁰ In a similar fashion, Leon Battista Alberti, in his writings on painting, had urged painters to use a wide range of figure types to create their *historia*:

The first thing that gives pleasure in a 'historia' is plentiful variety. Just as with food and music, novel and extraordinary things delight us for various reasons but especially because they are different from the old ones we are used to, so with everything the mind takes great pleasure in variety and abundance.³¹

Like Alberti, Pontano himself had also praised the variety and decorum that a painter was able to generate in his work.³² Nonetheless, not all Pontano's musings were based on established literary precepts. In the fourth section of the text, he went on to attempt to define the ornamental. Where Alberti had condemned ornament as inappropriate to buildings, Pontano took a very different vision of the term:

We call objects ornamental if we acquire them not so much for use as for embellishment and polish such as seals, paintings, tapestries, divans, ivory seats, cloth woven with gems, cases and caskets variously painted in the Arabic manner, little vases of crystal and other things of this type with which the house is adorned according to one's circumstances and with which one decorates dressers and tables. The sight of these things brings prestige to the owner of the house, when they are seen by the many who frequent his house. But the ornamental objects, which should be as magnificent and various as possible, should each be arranged in their own place. Thus one is fitting for the hall, another for the women's apartments.³³

This passage is a particularly important one, with a densely conceived set of arguments, unified by concern over categorization, decorum and display. The majority of objects cited above—statues, tapestries, ivory chairs and caskets—seem to have been either on permanent or semi-permanent public display or else brought out for use on specific occasions. Ornamental objects were, in Pontano's Aristotelian view, destined for an unusual end: their final purpose was prestige rather than practical employment. Ivory seats were designed to excite admiration, not to provide comfort; caskets were used as table accessories rather

than as locked compartments. In addition, in keeping with a general theory of decorum, each object was supposed to have a distinct place and position within the household. Yet despite the tantalizing hints concerning appropriate placement, Pontano offered few details as to which ornaments belonged in which rooms. This was not a text that could be followed in a prescriptive fashion; it was, instead, one that might provide the basis for a literary discussion or debate concerning the appropriate placement of one's ornaments and accessories.

'How to do it' may have been less important than spreading the knowledge that a carefully chosen investment had been made in one's possessions. In the next section of the treatise, Pontano went on to stress that it was not always necessary to open one's residence to the public in order to gain a reputation for splendour. In the short section on gems and pearls, a category that may have been included because of the stress that Pliny placed on their collecting in his *Natural History*, Pontano made it clear that one could benefit by spreading the knowledge of sophisticated ownership. Thus King Alfonso of Naples and the Duke de Berry were presented as exemplary collectors whose search for rare gems and jewels had ensured that their names were renowned throughout Europe. Again, with an eye to Aristotelian decorum and contemporary arguments about papal splendour, Pontano stressed that this was not always to be emulated by all collectors, writing:

It seemed that Pope Paul II wished to imitate the glory of these two princes (the King and the Duke de Berry), and it is said that he did so in order to join splendour to the pomp of the pontificate and to the ornament of the church. But however much pleasure he gained from this, it was seen as going beyond the dignity of a Pope.³⁴

The occasion for display was as important as the status of the individual organizing that display. The remainder of the text examines specific moments and formats in which splendour could be displayed, such as during a wedding, or in the selection and care of clothing, or through the ownership of gems and pearls, the planting of gardens and the collecting of exotic animals. It ends with the choice of aromatic plants for gardens where convivial gatherings could take place, emphasizing again that the splendid man needed to create a garden that was not for profit but

for pleasure. The countryside was as deserving of investment as the city; Pontano recommended that villas should not be built in the style of the *campagna* but with as much magnificence as an urban palace. Unlike Leon Battista Alberti's earlier vision of a private retreat, Pontano's villa was to act as a place of public entertainment:

Moreover, one should have gardens in which one can promenade and arrange banquets when needed. These gardens then should have exotic and rare plants, disposed with art and with the requisite care. In them it is particularly pleasant to have a careful disposition of myrtle, boxwood, citrus trees and rosemary, because the splendid man should not create gardens for the same purpose as a shrewd father who desires profit. . . . The splendid man will not just treat his own family well but will hold table for many of his fellow citizens and foreigners and just as day-old soup doesn't go in a silver plate so too a man of the first order does not eat humble cabbage. Thus just as his table will shine with gold and silver so too will it be splendid in its foods.³⁵

This discussion of garden banquets offered a smooth transition to the next dissertation on hospitality, a text that stressed the foods offered to guests.

As this final passage suggests, all five treatises were closely interconnected. A section in the treatise on hospitality, for example, examines the use of the cups and plates treated in *De splendore* during banquets.³⁶ *De splendore* does, however, raise a number of important issues in its own right. While it is emphatically not a manual in interior design, its negotiation between rhetorical tropes and contemporary practice suggests an interest in defining the domestic nature of splendour, one opposed to the overtly political public nature of magnificence. But what was the precise interaction between this literary shift and contemporary behaviour?

The audience

To elucidate an answer we need to determine the intended audience for these treatises. Would late fifteenth-century readers have recognized themselves in these descriptions? Would they have been able to call the objects described to mind, or would they have primarily appreciated the treatises as amusing exercises in Aristotelian philosophy?

Defining readership with precision is always difficult, particularly given the multi-layered audience for

Pontano's texts. Begun in the 1460s, the treatises were written over many decades. They were undoubtedly circulated in manuscript form amongst a select group of elite readers before being reworked for publication in the late 1490s. It is unclear when the dedications were determined, but the final selection of dedicatees does offer some insights into Pontano's changing intentions.

The five treatises are unusual in their lack of reference to contemporary figures. Although his other poetry and dialogues regularly referred to friends, relations, mistresses and patrons, here Pontano only cited classical or historical figures, relying on anecdotes drawn primarily from popular ancient historians. Thus Plutarch, Livy and Suetonius's *Lives of the Caesars* were extensively plundered for examples of excess and moderation. More recent models were taken from the earlier part of the fifteenth century. The crucial exemplar was King Alfonso of Aragon, whose sons were carefully ignored; a negative model was that of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Duke of Milan, who was assassinated by his courtiers in 1476 and who, Pontano pointedly reminded his readers, had refused to lend the humanist copies of valued manuscripts.³⁷

In the aftermath of the French invasions, praising the founder of the Aragonese dynasty may have been a nostalgic evocation of a once glorious past, but Pontano's intentions were more subtle. He used Roman emperors and Neapolitan kings as models because he was anxious to show that splendour, like magnificence, was appropriate to princes. In both *De splendore* and *De magnificentia*, Pontano made it clear that rulers were expected to excel in both public and private virtues. There was a careful balance to be drawn, however, and an avoidance of deficiency or excess remained the key quality in all his advice. Alexander Severus provided a warning. The emperor was:

liberal and magnificent in many things but he did not escape censure because he did not use gold during his banquets . . . his example cannot be praised in this case because he was an emperor and lord of the earth; so too Varius Eliogabolos should be criticized for using a gold vase to collect the excrement from his body. He made himself extremely ridiculous because he wore gems worked by the finest artists on his stockings, as if one could examine the excellence of carving worn on stockings!³⁸

Pontano followed this advice with an immediate injunction to share one's wealth, which could have been lifted from any treatise on magnificence:

The splendid man must ensure that it is clear from his deeds that he has not purchased the goods for himself, but for his household, his friends and his family and when the public good requires it, for the use and the comfort of the people as a whole.³⁹

This seems to suggest that splendour was merely a subcategory of magnificence, an additional means of praising the princes whom Pontano served. Yet this is not the full picture. Although the historical figures mentioned in the texts were drawn from the highest elite, suggesting that their original audience was intended to be the court aristocracy and the King himself, the published treatises had very different dedicatees. Pontano eventually offered the pieces not to princes, but to five long-standing friends and intellectual companions, the fellow humanists and poets who had worked alongside him and joined in his Academy meetings. These were Jacopo Sannazaro (Liberality), Rutilio Zenone (Charity), Gabriele Altilio (Magnificence), Benedetto Gareth known as il Chariteo (Splendour), and Giovanni Pardo (Hospitality).

The first treatise, *On Liberality*, opens with a preface praising Sannazaro, the writer who eventually became Pontano's own literary executor.⁴⁰ Sannazaro, like Pontano, was a widely regarded humanist and poet, the publication of whose *De partu virginis*, a lengthy praise of the birth of Christ in Latin hexameters, was anxiously awaited by figures such as Isabella d'Este, who sponsored the writer's medal in the hopes of becoming the dedicatee.⁴¹

The treatise on magnificence was similarly prefaced with praise for the poet and cleric Gabriele Altilio, the Bishop of Policastro.⁴² Altilio had acted as tutor to the Duke of Calabria's son, Ferrandino. Together with Pontano, he had followed Duke Alfonso to the battlefield between 1482 and 1484 during the War of Ferrara. In 1485, he found himself in Puglia accompanying Ferrandino in an attempt to force the submission of the rebellious barons; in 1487, he acted as a diplomat for the royal family in the Abruzzi. His clerical status owed more to financial exigencies than religious fervour. His salary of between 60 and 100 ducats was supplemented by numerous ecclesiastical benefices, culminating in the

bishopric of Policastro acquired in 1493. Despite these duties, Altilio became chief secretary to Ferrandino in 1494 as well as acting as the 'governor of his pages'.⁴³ With the arrival of French troops the following year, he retreated to his bishopric, where he died in 1501.

Rutilio Zenone, the recipient of the treatise on Charity, had a similarly mixed ecclesiastical and secretarial career. He too seems to have acted as a tutor to the royal family, accompanying one of the younger royals, Don Francesco d'Aragona, to Hungary and writing an oration for another son in 1492. Like Altilio he received much of his income from the ecclesiastical posts his Neapolitan patrons were able to secure for him, particularly the bishopric of San Marco in Calabria, which he received in 1484.⁴⁴

'On Hospitality' was dedicated to the now almost unknown poet and academician, Giovanni Pardo. In 1487, Pardo became a royal secretary at a salary of 150 ducats a year, ensuring that he was in almost daily contact with Pontano and il Chariteo. There were close literary interchanges. In Pontano's earlier treatise, *De sermone*, Pardo was lauded as a man with a 'courteous kindness and readiness to listen'.⁴⁵ He also appeared in Pontano's third book of *De rebus coelestibus* and in a number of his poems. Jacopo Sannazaro also developed a close friendship with Pardo, dedicating the second book of his *In maledicos distractus ad Ioannem Pardum Hispanus*, while il Chariteo included him along with Pontano, Sannazaro, Altilio and Pietro Summonte in his major poem, the *Canzone intitolata Aragonia*.⁴⁶

The dedicatee of *De splendore* was formally known as Benedetto Gareth or Garetus, and more commonly as il Chariteo. Born in Barcelona, he used his Catalan connections to join court service after arriving in Naples in the 1470s. He succeeded Pontano as chief secretary to King Ferrante, eventually taking over his lucrative position as head of the *Sommaria*.⁴⁷ Il Chariteo's writing, focused primarily on a mixture of platonic and erotic love poetry, brought him considerable renown.⁴⁸ But royal service, closely linked to that of Pontano, dominated his career. He was regarded as highly loyal to the crown; on 8 August 1486 he was created holder of the Great Seal, *conservatore del regio sigillo grande*, a post previously held by the disgraced royal treasurer, Antonello Petrucci, who had just been imprisoned for treason. That same year, il Chariteo travelled with Pontano

and the King in Puglia; in 1487, he joined Pontano and Giovanni Pardo in a newly constructed chancery built in the former's own home.⁴⁹ Il Chariteo's own residence was only a few yards away. By 1495, when Ferrante II fled the French invasion, il Chariteo went into exile with his master to Procida, leaving all his books in safekeeping with the writer, Pietro Summonte.⁵⁰ On his return from exile, il Chariteo benefited from his loyalty, replacing Pontano as chief secretary to the King.

Pontano's choice of dedication seems to have been slightly tongue-in-cheek. Although the dedicatee was well paid, il Chariteo seems to have been better-known as a man of simple tastes rather than one who avidly collected ornamental objects.⁵¹ Summonte referred to him as a 'good gentleman', and 'a gentle and rare spirit, who delighted in speaking poetically and as a true courtier, in which two skills he put forward, as all know, most singular and eminent ideas'.⁵² In the preface to the treatise on splendour, Pontano pointed out the irony of dedicating the text to one who had so few possessions; il Chariteo himself boasted in a sonnet that his home contained neither gold nor ivory: 'You will not find in my house either ivory or gold, I hold vain ambition as a thing to be hated; happy is he who does not disdain the humble condition'.⁵³

If the poet made any investments in physical objects, he did so in manuscripts. At his death, his widow was forced to sell many of his books to survive. But as Pontano's preface stressed, one did not have to be a man of great wealth in order to demonstrate the virtue of splendour. Where an effort to appear magnificent might prove financially ruinous; splendour could be achieved by careful selection of high-quality items appropriate to one's economic means.

The final audience for a text such as *De splendore* was not, therefore, the stratified Neapolitan and Catalan court aristocracy who had made up so many of Pontano's earlier dedicatees.⁵⁴ Instead, the dedications imply that they were written for a the highly fluid, ambitious intelligentsia who had flourished in the royal administration and in Pontano's own literary milieu.⁵⁵ The pangyric to Sannazaro in *On Liberality* seems to confirm this, arguing that the writer was providing a guide to the 'administrators of the kingdom'.⁵⁶ The pieces were also a paean to friendship. All five dedicatees were intellectual and

social intimates who had spent considerable periods in each other's company, showing up as witnesses in day-to-day transactions, as well as appearing as protagonists in each other's writings and poetry.⁵⁷

They had all shared important common experiences. Having arrived with little or no social or economic standing, they relied on their salaries and favour with the King and his son, the Duke of Calabria, for advancement in Naples. Serving in the secretariat, acting as tutors, librarians, jobbing poets and often following their employers onto the battlefield, the group was particularly associated with Alfonso II, whose influence at court was overshadowed by his long-lived father, Ferrante.⁵⁸ All five were eventually successful in establishing a stable economic position in one of two ways. Figures such as Altilio and Rutilio Zenone were given substantial clerical benefices through the King's patronage. Both retired to their respective monasteries following the fall of the Aragonese dynasty. Sannazaro and il Chariteo had more secular lifestyles, receiving either well-connected wives or positions and/or property that allowed them a degree of independence and luxury. Some of the documentation that survives for il Chariteo, for example, concerns his Spanish wife Petronilla Vignoles's purchase of a white Turkish slave for the substantial sum of 30 ducats and the emancipation of a black woman from their household a few years later, an act witnessed by Sannazaro himself.⁵⁹

It may have been the needs and interests of this new closely-knit group of administrators and intellectuals that either prompted or encouraged the fragmentation of the single Aristotelian category of magnificence. In the Nichomachean ethics and its successors, *Magnificentia* could be achieved by any figure of wealth and renown. With the Aragonese dynasty's fragile hold on political authority, magnificence was primarily the preserve of princes who illustrated authority through great public works. Attempts by those not born to this standing to contribute to the city's appearance could be perceived as threats to social order and to the kingship itself. The King's secretary and financier, Antonello Petrucci, had transgressed these boundaries by his lavish expenditure and had found himself imprisoned, tried and executed on charges of treason.⁶⁰

This new category, splendour, allowed Pontano and his colleagues to mark their sophistication

within the limits of their means, both financial and political. While there was still an expectation that princes should do more in terms of their spending, above all in their public spending on behalf of the state, courtiers and servants could still make an effort. Thus Section Six, 'The Care and Ornament of the Body', is careful to differentiate between the expectations of the royal wardrobe, and those of 'men of different age and status'.⁶¹ Like sumptuary laws, these neo-Aristotelian treatises provided guidelines by which the goods, clothing and entertainments of patricians and poets could be measured and assessed alongside rather than in competition with their signorial rulers.

Pontano had proved a master in creating this role himself. Of relatively impoverished origins, the writer had built up considerable wealth during his Neapolitan career. Much of his income derived from his annual salary of 66 ounces and 20 tari, roughly equivalent to about 400 ducats.⁶² This was in addition to the funds that he received to run the royal chancellery and the dowry his well-connected wife provided. In addition, Alfonso II supposedly rewarded his secretary with a castle worth 800 ducats per year and gave his son a galley to improve his position as a merchant-trader. By the end of his career, Pontano owned a palace in the city centre near the home of Antonio Panormita. He had received the building in poor condition and had restored it elegantly, creating, according to his own description in his dialogue, *Aegidius*, a portico and courtyard in hemispherical fashion containing seats where members of his Academy could gather.⁶³ Following the death of his wife in 1490, Pontano began work on a family chapel that was built along the most sophisticated classical models and simply marked with Latin inscriptions in memory of himself and his wife. Pontano had already constructed a villa on land that he had purchased in 1472, with, it appears, gardens much like those described in *De splendore*, in the hills outside the city.⁶⁴ All these works, elegant in themselves, but not excessively ambitious, were appropriate to a man of his standing. They did not cross over into a direct challenge or comparison with his princely masters' much more grandiose projects, such as the two enormous villas that Alfonso II commissioned from Giuliano da San Gallo. In his treatise, it could be argued, Pontano provided both a definition for this decorum and a

category of expenditure and display, that of splendour, which was open to all men who aspired to his success. While it should not be read as either a rigidly prescriptive text, a 'how-to' manual, it was not totally removed from the experience of this new class of bureaucratic humanist. The traditional Aristotelian rhetoric and categorization offered a language and a mode of expression that allowed Pontano and his colleagues to express and shape the concepts which defined their new status in a rapidly changing world.

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Notes

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- 1 Translation taken from C. Gilbert, *Italian Art, 1400–1500. Sources and Documents*, Northwestern University Press, 1992, p. 154. For the original, see Frater Felicitas Fabri, *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti peregrinationem*, Societatis Literariae Stuttgartensis, 1849, vol. 3, pp. 395–6.
- 2 Gilbert, op. cit., p. 154.
- 3 Ibid., p. 154.
- 4 R. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300–1600*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993 and the papers in G. Neher & R. Shepherd (eds.), *Revaluing Renaissance Art*, Ashgate Press, 2000.
- 5 G. Pontano, *I libri delle virtù sociali*, Bulzoni, 1999.
- 6 H. Baron, 'Franciscan poverty and civic wealth as factors in the rise of humanistic thought', *Speculum*, no. 13, 1938, pp. 18–25 and R. De Roover, *San Bernardino of Siena and Sant' Antonino of Florence: The Two Great Economic Thinkers of the Middle Ages*, Baker Library, Harvard Graduate School of Business Administration, 1967. See also the discussion in D. Thompson, *Renaissance Architecture: Critics, Patrons, Luxury*, Manchester University Press, 1993.
- 7 A. D. Jenkins, 'Cosimo dei Medici's patronage of architecture and the theory of Magnificence', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, no. 33, 1970, pp. 162–70 and W. Gundersheimer, *Art and Life at the Court of Ercole I d'Este. The De Triumphis Religionis of Sabadino degli Arienti*, Librarian Droz, 1972. For perceptive, if often conflicting, overviews of the attitude towards wealth in this period, see, Goldthwaite, 1993 and L. Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance*, MacMillan, 1996.
- 8 F. Tateo, 'Le virtù sociali e l'immanità nella trattatistica Pontaniana', *Rinascimento*, n.s., no. 5, 1965, pp. 119–64. For the most recent discussion of these concepts, see G. Guerzoni, 'Liberalitas, Magnificentia, Splendor: the classical origins of Italian Renaissance lifestyles', in N. De Marchi & C. D. W. Goodwin, *Economic Engagements with Art*, Duke University Press, 1999, pp. 332–78.
- 9 For Pontano's biography, see E. Percopo, *Vita di Giovanni Pontano*, ed. M. Manfredi, Naples, 1938, which still remains the best source available. Other biographies include A. Altamura, *Giovanni Pontano*, Naples, 1938 and C. Kidwell, *Pontano. Poet and Prime Minister*, Duckworth, 1991. On Pontano's writings, see more specifically, F. Tateo, *L'umanesimo etico di Giovanni Pontano*, Milella, 1972.
- 10 Kidwell, op. cit., p. 31.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 5 and 40.
- 12 F. Gabotto, *Lettere inedite di Giovanni Pontano in nome de' reali di Napoli*, G. Romagnoli, 1893. On Pontano and Ippolita Maria Sforza, see E. S. Welch, 'Between Milan and Naples: Ippolita Maria Sforza, Duchess of Calabria', in D. Abulafia, *The French Descent into Renaissance Italy, 1494–95: Antecedents and Effects*, Variorum Press, 1995, pp. 123–36.
- 13 For a general history of Naples during this period, see G. Galasso, *Il Regno di Napoli. Il Mezzogiorno angioino e aragonese (1266–1494)*, Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1992, Part Three.
- 14 F. Tateo, *Astrologia e moralità in Giovanni Pontano*, Adriatica Editrice, 1960 and C. Trinkaus, 'The astrological cosmos and rhetorical culture of Giovanni Pontano', *Renaissance Quarterly*, no. 38, 1985, pp. 446–72.
- 15 A copy of Pontano's *De principe* was recorded in the Aragonese royal library. It had been copied by the secretary Joan Marco Cinico in 1468 and is now in the Biblioteca Universitaria di Valencia, 854. There are four other known fifteenth-century versions of the text. See M. Romano, *La trattatistica politica nel secolo xv e il "De Principe" di Giovanni Pontano*, Potenza, 1901.
- 16 Ioannis Iovani Pontani, *Opera Omnia soluta oratione composita. Venetiis: in aedibus Aldi et Andreae soceri, Mense Iunio, 1518–1519*, I, f. 94r: absit ab omni corporis motu rusticitas et petulantia, manum complosio, et brachiorum concitata motio, omnino inepra . . . Vestitus quoque et totius corporis ornatus aptus et decens multum conferet et ad retinendam et ad augendam quam dico Maiestatem. See also G. M. Cappelli, *Per l'edizione critica de "De Principe" di Giovanni Pontano*, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1993.
- 17 Kidwell, op. cit., pp. 12–14. On the impact of the French invasions in Naples, see the essays in Abulafia, op. cit.
- 18 Percopo, op. cit., p. 77.
- 19 On printing in Naples see, M. Fava & G. Bresciano (eds.), *La stampa a Napoli nel xv secolo*, 3 vols., R. Haupt, 1911–13.
- 20 L. Green, 'Galvano Fiamma, Azzone Visconti and the revival of the classical theory of Magnificence', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, no. 53, 1990, pp. 98–113. See also, Guerzoni, op. cit.
- 21 J. Barnes (ed.), *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Princeton University Press, 1985, vol. 2, p. 1772.
- 22 Green, op. cit.
- 23 Jenkins, op. cit.
- 24 See also D. Lojacomo, 'L'opera inedita "De Maiestate" di Giannino Majo e il concetto di de principe negli scrittori della corte aragonese di Napoli', *Atti della Reale Accademia di Scienze morali e politiche*, 14, 1891.
- 25 G. Pontano, *Liber Prior: De Fortitudine bellica et heroica . . . De Fortitudine domestica. Liber posterior*, in *Opera Omnia*, f. 73v–86r.
- 26 Tateo, 1999, pp. 40–135.

- 27 Ibid., p. 224.
- 28 Ibid., p. 228.
- 29 Ibid., p. 228.
- 30 F. Ames-Lewis, 'Introduction', in *Deonim in Renaissance Narrative Art*, Department of History of Art, Birkbeck College, 1992, p. 8.
- 31 L. B. Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. C. Grayson, Penguin, 1991, p. 75.
- 32 Trinkaus, op. cit., p. 457.
- 33 Tateo, 1999, pp. 232.
- 34 Ibid., p. 238.
- 35 Ibid., p. 240–1.
- 36 Ibid., p. 260 and Guerzoni, op. cit.
- 37 Tateo, 1999, pp. 74–6 and Kidwell, op. cit., p. 269.
- 38 Tateo, 1999, p. 230.
- 39 Ibid., p. 230.
- 40 On Sanazzaro, see C. Kidwell, *Sannazaro and Arcadia*, Duckworth, 1993 and for the literary connections, see W. H. Bond, 'A printer's manuscript of 1508', *Studies in Bibliography. Papers of the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia*, no. 8, 1956, pp. 147–56.
- 41 A. Luzio & R. Renier, 'La cultura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este Gonzaga', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, no. 33–42, 1903, p. 413. Jacopo Perillo to Mario Equicola, 11 June 1519: lo disse al Sannazaro che Madonna nostra illustrissima me havea comandato che facesse ogni dispesa pur che facesse andare per lo mondo il Sanazaro in midaglia, et con lungissime parole li disse che Madonna illustrissima sempre pensava a la gloria del Sanazaro. Et lui ne li rese infinite grazie, et già mi ha dato la hora che lo maestro lo possa ritrahere in cera per poterlo dopo buttare in bronzo. Questo io lo ho fatto con tale disegno, perchè lui vole fare uscire alcune sue cose, et io lo voglio obligare tanto a Madona illustrissima che lo possa astrengere che intitola le cose sue a sua signora illustrissima, et ve giuro che per prima paga ho dato cinque ducati de oro al maestro quale è lo migliore che sia in Napoli. Ma sappi che'l Sanazaro ne ha pigliato tanto piacere che quasi incredibile et parli mille anni che sia finita, acciochè se ne facciano tante che per tutta Italia ne siano, et ovunque si trova sempre dice alcuna cosa in laude de Madona nostra illustrissima.
- 42 F. Nicolini, 'Altilio, Gabriele', *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, 2, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1960, pp. 565–6. See also E. Percopo, 'Nuovi documenti su gli scrittori e gli artisti dei tempi Aragonesi', *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, no. 18, 1893, pp. 561–74.
- 43 Percopo, 1893, p. 529.
- 44 Ibid., p. 580.
- 45 Percopo, 1938, pp. 580 and 305 and Kidwell, 1991, p. 287.
- 46 Percopo, 1893, p. 305.
- 47 One example of these links is the appearance of both Pardo and Chariteo as important protagonists in Pontano's dialogue, *Asinus, the Donkey*, written after the humanist's failure to gain recognition for his diplomatic successes in Rome in 1486. In the text, Chariteo is charged with purchasing luxury goods for the donkey with which Pontano, in his madness following the ungrateful response of his master, has fallen in love. He buys bronze bells, headdresses and calls to Pardo to 'Come to my house and see the silver and gold plate, the little flowers studded with gems and the cloth of gold being made ready for the ass.' See Kidwell, 1991, p. 195.
- 48 E. Percopo (ed.), *Le Rime di Benedetto Gareth detto il Chanteo secondo le due stampe originali*, Naples, 1892, 2 vols., I, p. xvii.
- 49 Ibid., I, p. xxii.
- 50 Ibid., I, p. xxvii.
- 51 Ibid., I, p. xxxi.
- 52 Ibid., I, p. xxii: gentile e raro spirito che si dilectava parlare poeticamente o vero da cortesano; in le quali doe facultà epose era (come ciascun sa) così eminente e singulare.
- 53 Ibid., I, p. li, note 3: Non fulge nel mio albergo auro nì avorio. La vana ambizione in odio tegno. Felice quel, che . . . del stato umil non havea sdegno.
- 54 For example, *On Obedience* was dedicated to Roberto da San Severino, Grand Admiral of Naples. *On Fortitude* was dedicated to the Duke of Calabria, the future Alfonso II.
- 55 J. H. Bentley, *Politics and Culture in Renaissance Naples*, Princeton University Press, 1987.
- 56 Kidwell, 1991, p. 268.
- 57 The close literary connections between Altilio and Sannazaro can be seen in the posthumous publication of the former's marriage poem, the *Epitalamio Catulliano*, first written in 1489 for the wedding of Isabella of Aragon to Gian Galeazzo Maria Sforza. It was eventually published as an appendix to Sannazaro's 1528 edition of *De partu Virginis*; Altilio also wrote elegies to Sannazaro and letters to il Chariteo. See Nicolini, op. cit., p. 566.
- 58 G. Hersey, *Alfonso II and the Artistic Renewal of Naples 1485–1495*, Yale University Press, 1969.
- 59 T. De Mannis, 'Tre documenti inediti riguardanti il Chariteo', *Archivio storico per le provincie napoletane*, no. 23, 1898, pp. 393–403.
- 60 Galasso, op. cit., pp. 695–700.
- 61 Tateo, 1965, p. 275.
- 62 On Pontano's income, see Bentley, 1987, p. 131 and Kidwell, 1991, p. 296.
- 63 R. Filangieri di Candida Gonzaga, 'Il tempio di Giovanni Pontano in Napoli', *Atti dell'Accademia Pontaniana*, Naples, 1926.
- 64 Hersey, op. cit. and Kidwell, 1991, pp. 98–103.