RS904: Week 1

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**Renaissance Political Thought in Fifteenth-century Italy: Mirrors for Princes**

This session will look at the evolution of Italian political thought, focusing in particular on the second half of the fifteenth century and pre-Machiavellian age, analysing the development of the genre of ‘mirrors for princes’ as one of the main literary forms of political theorization. More specifically, we will see how a new princely ideology emerged in this period, with direct implications in the historical context of Italian states of those years. This princely theory is characterised by distinctive elements that connect political thought with the specific cultural and historical horizon of the pre-Machiavellian age, but at the same time it already reveals some components that will influence political speculation of the following centuries.

## We will focus on one of the main mirrors for princes of the Renaissance, Giovanni Pontano’s *De principe*, written by one of the most illustrious and eclectic intellectuals of Italian Humanism, who was a poet, historian, political thinker and diplomat. We will consider briefly also other texts produced in the same period in the kingdom of Naples, where the significant growth of a new theory of princely statecraft was put forward through different literary and artistic vehicles, and in particular through political treatises. After a general overview of the historical and political context of Italian states, in the seminar we will adopt an interdisciplinary approach, across literature, political philosophy, history (and possibly art, with the comparison between texts and original images of artworks that will be shown at the seminar); and the discussion will be based on textual analysis and interpretation of specific passages. Starting from Pontano’s work, we will consider some issues that are fundamental in understanding the complexity of Renaissance political thought: How were political theories put forward in literary texts (in particular in Pontano’s work)? How did historical elements influence political speculation? What is the role of the classical tradition in mirrors for princes (in this case in Pontano’s text)? What are the main political virtues which are regarded as fundamental for a ruler? What are the main ideological cornerstones of this ideal political system? To what extent is this political theory based on ethical principles? What is the role played by the notion of political consensus in this model of state?

**Bibliography** (an asterisk marks mandatory readings)

Primary Readings

\* Giovanni Pontano, *De Principe*, in *Cambridge translations of Renaissance philosophical texts: II. Political Philosophy*, ed. by J. Kraye, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), vol. 2, pp. 69-86 [English translation]

Giovanni Pontano, *De Principe*, ed. by G. M. Cappelli (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2003) [Latin text and Italian translation, with a excellent critiacal introduction]

[for a possible comparative analysis] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The prince*, transl. and ed. by Peter Bondanella, with an introduction by Maurizio Viroli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Secondary Readings

# \* N. Rubinstein, ‘Italian Political Thought, 1450-1530, in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700*, ed. by J. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 30-65.

\* Q. Skinner, *The* *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. I, part II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978): ‘The age of princes’, pp. 113-138.

Q. Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 2 *Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) [chapters: ‘Ambrogio Lorenzetti and the portrayal of virtuous government’, pp. 39-92; ‘Ambrogio Lorenzetti and the power and glory of republics’, pp. 93-117].

# \* J. Hankins, ‘Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. by J. Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 118-141.

# M. Roick, *Pontano’s virtues. Aristotelian moral and political thought in the Renaissance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

\* J. H. Bentley, *Politics and Culture in Renaissance Naples* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) [in particular, pp. 3-83, 195-252].

G. Cappelli, *Maiestas: politica e pensiero politico nella Napoli aragonese (1443-1503)* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2016).

J. Barreto, *La majesté en images: portraits du pouvoir dans la Naples des Aragon* (Roma:  École française de Rome, 2013).

P. Stacey, *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).