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Italian Renaissance Diplomacy: A Sourcebook. Ed. Monica Azzolini and Isabella Lazzarini.

Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2017. x + 300 pp.
1 b&w and 6 color illus. €30.00. ISBN 978-0-88844-566-7.

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Diplomatic history has recently been experiencing a surge of academic activity, particularly in the Renaissance and early modern periods. Studies of diplomats, the diplomatic networks of men and women from merchants to aristocrats and royals, as well as examinations of the mechanism of diplomacy itself have all garnered deserved attention. This surge of activity can be seen in recent publications and the creation of organizations such as the Premodern Diplomats Network, their Splendid Encounters conference series, and their new journal, *Legatio*. Understanding the origins and development of diplomacy is a key aspect of the field, hence the interest in the Italian Renaissance, long considered to be the genesis of modern diplomatic practices. This sourcebook offers an opportunity for scholars and students of both diplomacy and the Italian Renaissance itself to gain a better understanding of the establishment of modern diplomacy and the ways in which diplomacy functioned as a core aspect of society and politics, in times of war and peace.

With any sourcebook the challenge is to select sources which are not only useful, but work well in combination, translate and edit them with care, organize them in a useful and clear fashion, and contextualize them with the information that the reader needs to understand their content and significance. This particular collection has, to a large extent, ticked all the boxes and the editors' care and diligence is evident throughout. The sources themselves are rich and varied, revealing not only a wealth of information on diplomatic practices and activity but are also useful in terms of understanding Renaissance society in a broader sense. For example, one of the most fascinating sets of sources are a series of letters concerning the well-being of Maddelena de Medici Cybo, a young bride whose marriage had vital diplomatic importance. Yet though these rather gossipy letters demonstrate that the marriage itself, and potentially also the alliance that it was intended to support, was in danger of collapse because of the couple's strained relationship, what is potentially even more engaging are the intimate details of Maddelena's poor health. Thus, these letters are a useful source for gaining an insight into medical practices and beliefs in the fifteenth century as well as the realities of marriage and gender relations.

The editing and translation of the source material appears to be generally well handled; however, since the original text of the sources is not included, it is difficult to make a secure judgment of the efficacy of the translations themselves. It is perhaps a missed opportunity not to include the original text in order to have side by side translations. If the original texts had been included, it would have

broadened the use of the collection to make it both a valuable tool for those teaching Renaissance Italian and for scholars who would like to use the original text but perhaps cannot access the archives from which these works are drawn. But many sourcebooks for reasons of space and organization have only translations, so this choice is perfectly understandable. Although the translated texts are generally smoothly handled, there are some cases where the editors have decided to summarize with “excerpts” rather than include the entire, directly translated text of the original document (e.g., see Letter 1.3, chap. 7 [120–21]). These excerpts, while giving a sense of the contents of the document, are rather unclear in terms of what the text of the original document is versus the summary framed by the editor. It would be very easy for a student to end up erroneously quoting what they thought was an original document but was instead the editorial prose. As the entire point of a sourcebook is to provide printed copies and/or translations of original documents, it is a questionable choice to effectively omit the majority of the document itself; however, most of the documents in the book are fully translated, with these excerpts being the exception, not the rule. Another slightly questionable choice was the inclusion of color plates at the beginning, which are not only expensive to produce but add little to the text itself; however, the map of Italy in the period on the preliminary pages is certainly beneficial.

The organization and the contextualization of the documents is the greatest editorial strength of the collection. The main introduction itself would make an excellent stand-alone, introductory reading for students of Italian Renaissance diplomacy. The work is divided into thematic chapters that contain either groupings of shorter documents or one or two longer documents. Each chapter begins with a short introduction that gives a useful background to the topic and type of source material and how it relates to the development and practice of diplomacy as well as Renaissance society. Then each document is prefaced with a thorough context that helps the reader understand both the document’s context and significance. The provenance of the source and the key protagonists are clearly identified and any information or explanation needed to follow the author’s narrative is given in the footnotes. Finding a document which may be useful for one’s own research or teaching activities is made simple through the table of contents and dual indices: a standard index plus a second listing of the translated documents by date, sender, and recipient, which is particularly helpful.

Overall, this is an excellent collection, which I would heartily recommend to scholars, instructors, and students. The price makes it accessible for personal purchase or to order multiple copies for reference in an institutional library. It would be particularly valuable as a teaching tool for classes on Renaissance diplomacy, society, and general history. I can already see the potential application of the work across several modules that teach across all undergraduate year groups. Although this collection is an incredibly helpful tool for study and research on its own, combining it with monographs on the practice of Renaissance diplomacy, from Garrett Mattingly onwards, or with other key works on the politics of the

period would make an ideal way to place these sources in greater context and thus create a wider understanding of the impact of the development of diplomacy in this period.

