

Roberta Ricci, ed. Poggio Bracciolini and the Re(dis)covery of Antiquity: Textual and Material Traditions. Proceedings of the Symposium held at Bryn Mawr College on April 8–9, 2016

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Roberta Ricci, ed. *Poggio Bracciolini and the Re(dis)covery of Antiquity: Textual and Material Traditions. Proceedings of the Symposium held at Bryn Mawr College on April 8–9, 2016*. Florence: Firenze University Press, 2020. Pp. xii + 205. ISBN 9788864539676.

The Bryn Mawr library holds “one of the great Renaissance book collections in the US” (190). While recognizing the achievements of Howard Lehman Goodhart and his daughter, Phyllis Goodhart Gordan, as collectors and scholars, and especially Phyllis’s edition and translation of Poggio’s letters, *Two Renaissance Book Hunters: The Letters of Poggius Bracciolini to Nicolaus de Niccolis* (1974), the essays in this volume explore Poggio Bracciolini’s contributions to the humanist project and his life, posthumous reputation, and relations with other humanists. The essays offer original research and expertise, and the resulting portrait of Poggio Bracciolini and the vitality of Florentine humanism in the first half of the fifteenth century is precise and nuanced.

As David Rundle writes in his essay, “Poggio Bracciolini’s International Reputation and the Significance of Bryn Mawr, Ms. 48,” Poggio lived a “life in two parts: as scribe and as author” (42). In his discussion of the man and the manuscript, previously thought to be Italian but in fact copied by the Englishman Thomas Candour, Rundle explores Poggio’s carefully nurtured reputation as a philosopher who was read even by clerics. Men like Candour, who spent a decade or so in Italy as a student of canon law and at the papal curia, promoted and spread Poggio’s fame as a moral philosopher. Both Rundle and David Cast explain how Poggio’s efforts to portray himself as a moralist were undermined by the success of his *Liber facetiarum*. Cast’s contribution, “Poggio the Florentyn: A Sketch of the Life of Poggio Bracciolini,” focuses on Poggio’s *curriculum vitae* and important contributions to humanist scholarship, his shifting posthumous fame, and his disputes with fellow scholars, which Cast calls “an inevitable part of the scholarly life” (163).

An essay by Julia Haig Gaiser, entitled “Poggio and Other Book Hunters,” makes several points pertaining to Nicolò Niccoli, who encouraged and sometimes harried Poggio in his hunt for manuscripts (likewise recognized in Gordan’s title, *Two Renaissance Book Hunters*). The “Poggio” of Bryn Mawr, Gaiser writes, is Phyllis Goodhart Gordan, and the role of Niccoli belongs both to her fellow alumnae and to the Friends of the Bryn Mawr College Library. The enterprise of Gordan and her father as book hunters is also presented in Roberta Ricci’s

introduction to the volume, and in the final essay by Eric L. Pumroy, “Formation of the Goodhart Collection of Fifteenth-Century Books at Bryn Mawr College.”

At the heart of the volume are three essays addressing what Ricci refers to as the “technologies of writing” (IX–X), probably Poggio’s most important contribution to the humanist movement. Philippa Sissis, in her essay “Script as Image: Visual Acuity in the Script of Poggio Bracciolini,” examines the efforts of Poggio, Coluccio Salutati, and Nicolò Niccoli to create a new philology. Poggio’s introduction of the *littera antiqua*, a revision of the Carolingian miniscule, was fundamental to the project of recovery, collation, copying, and dissemination of manuscripts, as the humanists sought to cleanse the texts, to the extent possible, of the traces left by over a millenium of transmission. Sissis demonstrates how, from Poggio’s earliest extant work, such as his copy of Cicero’s *De legibus* in Vat. Lat. 3245, he consciously adopted or adapted elements from his models to create “a visual paratext on the ancient authors” (120).

Roberta Ricci’s “Shifting Times, Converging Futures: Technologies of Writing Beyond Poggio Bracciolini” focuses on the humanist endeavour in the digital age, concluding with some thoughts about Poggio—namely, how his interest in establishing a legible and “correct” text inspired textual and historical criticism in future generations, and the way in which improved legibility inspired printers to adopt standard Roman type. Ricci ends with an exhortation to inspire “critical engagement and scholarly audacity” (111) in our students today.

An essay by Paul Shaw, “Poggio Bracciolini, an Inscription in Terranuova, and the Monument to Carlo Marsuppini: A Theory,” focuses on Poggio’s effort to introduce Imperial Roman capitals in monumental epigraphs. Shaw hypothesizes that the eighteen-line dedication plaque at the church of Santa Maria in Terranuova Bracciolini, which reveals a progressive transition from the Florentine sans serif to the Imperial Roman capital, reflects Poggio’s attempt to tutor the stone cutter in the new script. The letters in the final lines mostly match the epitaph on the monument to Carlo Marsuppini in Santa Croce, and Shaw proposes that Poggio was also involved in the production of the monument for his friend and colleague in the chancellorry.

Lack of space does not allow for a full discussion of the remaining excellent essays, like Stefano U. Baldassari’s “Poggio Bracciolini and Coluccio Salutati: The Epitaph and the 1405–1406 Letters.” It probes the profound and enduring influence of the master on the student, the centrality in Humanist debates of the question of the superiority of Christian writers like Petrarch over Ancient authors,

the regret Poggio suffered when Coluccio died before they were fully reconciled on the question, and the ways in which passages from their correspondence were borrowed by Leonardo Bruni when he wrote his *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum*.

An essay by Ann Mullaney and Massimo Zaggia, "Florence 1438: The Encomium of the *Florentina Libertas* Sent by Poggio Bracciolini to Duke Filippo Maria Visconti," presents a new critical edition and translation of the exchange between the duke's secretary, Pier Candidio Decembrio, and Poggio that highlights (or rather obfuscates) the vexed question of *Florentina Libertas* at a time when Poggio's friend, Cosimo de' Medici, had seized control of the government. Outi Merisalo discusses the "material transmission" (37) of Poggio's final work in "The *Historiae Florentini populi* by Poggio Bracciolini: Genesis and Fortune of an Alternative History of Florence." Only a partial manuscript survives, but Poggio's son, Jacopo, edited and printed the history, and then translated it into Italian. It is "an alternative history" because, as Merisalo observes, Jacopo's intervention entailed the anti-Medici Strozzi family, and he dedicated the book to Frederick of Montefeltro, who was involved in the Pazzi conspiracy against the Medici, while Jacopo himself was an active participant in the conspiracy. Finally, an essay by David Marsh, "Poggio and Alberti Revisited," explores the friendship and enmity of these two men as well as various passages in which Alberti appears to have been influenced of Poggio.

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