

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Villani, Stefano. Making Italy Anglican: Why the Book of Common Prayer Was Translated into Italian

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Volume 46, Number 1, Winter 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1107813ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v46i1.41765>

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Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Nelson Novoa, J. (2023). Review of [Villani, Stefano. Making Italy Anglican: Why the Book of Common Prayer Was Translated into Italian]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 46(1), 301–303.
<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v46i1.41765>

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Villani, Stefano.

Making Italy Anglican: Why the Book of Common Prayer Was Translated into Italian.

Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. xiv, 292 + 7 b/w halftones. ISBN 9780197587737 (hardcover) US\$99.

This book is singular in its approach for it at once is the story of a resounding failure and the chronicle of an impressive accomplishment. Italy, of course, did not become Anglican, yet the Book of Common Prayer was indeed translated into the Italian language. The study, penned by a scholar equally at home in the English and Italian early modern period, deals with both questions and answers that provide readers with a gripping read. In a sense only an early modern historian like Stefano Villani—steeped in Italian and English scholarship, trained in his trade in Italy, and engaged in a professional life in both his native Italy and the United States—is so correctly placed to be able to deal with English Protestants in Italy and Italian Protestants in England. Already an impressive body of previous work evinces his clear mastery of both questions and contexts. Now this monograph confirms and consolidates many of the questions and problems he has been working on for decades.

Making Italy Anglican begins in Venice then shifts to London to later return to the Italian Peninsula. It straddles several centuries, beginning in the sixteenth century to conclude at the end of the nineteenth. Villani takes his readers on a breathtaking voyage, displaying the sheer complexity of questions about the religious profession, community, belonging, and translation to furnish us with the tools for explaining why the prayer book was such a paramount failure throughout the Italian Peninsula. It is as much the story of a book as it is about the people involved in its dissemination and use in the Italian language and the complicated and intricate history of Italy from the early modern to the modern period. In his introduction, the author states that it is “a story of failure—or rather, a series of interconnected failures that stretched over a period of almost three hundred years” (1). More than the failure of the dissemination of a prayer book, it was the failure of a model for religious practice that could rival or dispute Roman Catholic hegemony on the Italian Peninsula over three centuries, despite the efforts of interested parties in Italy and England. The book presents some of the seminal figures in this fascinating failure, some of them well known and others less so, such as Paolo Sarpi, Henry Wotton, William

Bedell, Dudley Carleton, Giovanni Diodati, Marco Antonio de Dominis, John Florio, Alessandro Amidei, and George Frederick Nott, shedding important new light on all of them.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, "A Failed Schism," chronicles the attempt to engineer a schism with Rome on the part of the Republic of Venice, carefully reconstructing the complex roles of Paolo Sarpi and the English ambassador Henry Wotten in an enterprise which, ultimately, did not succeed. While plans for a separation from Rome along the English model or even a Protestant congregation failed, they did give rise to the first translation of the Book of Common Prayer into Italian, of which there is no trace. Villani shows, however, that this first translation, from 1608, was likely the basis for the first extant translation. The 1608 translation could have been penned by one Alessandro Amidei, a singular figure with an elusive identity who made a copy of the Italian translation of the prayer book. Amidei, however, was known to make false claims about authorship of this and many other works. Also in this first section of the book, Villani reconstructs the story of the fledgling Italian Protestant community of London which attempted several times to constitute and reconstitute itself.

In the second part, "From the 1685 Brown Edition to the 1820s Polyglot Editions," Villani presents the story of the first printed edition of the text from 1685, largely destined for use among Italian Anglicans in England at the outset but often used as aids to learn the Italian language. The translation, which was revised several times and had several reprintings into the beginning of the nineteenth century, appearing in polyglot editions, was also used for proselytism abroad, especially on the Italian Peninsula. The third and last part of the book, "From the 1831 Nott Edition to the 1861 Camilleri Revision and Beyond," considers the 1831 translation by the English cleric and Italophile George Frederick Nott. This edition was largely used for missionary purposes, most particularly in British-occupied Malta but also other localities in the Levant and the Mediterranean in which the Italian language was largely the working *lingua franca*. This part also considers the revisions made to the translation in 1841, copies of which were destined for use by Italian Protestants in England and Anglican missionaries abroad. It also chronicles the fascinating story of the efforts of the Church of England to use the surge in anti-papal violence and the push for Italian unification to its advantage as an alternative to Roman Catholic hegemony on the peninsula.

The 1849–60 repression, however, effectively snuffed out these hopes for an Anglicanization of Italy, though it did give rise to greater numbers of the Italian Anglican community in England thanks to the arrival of exiles. As Villani convincingly shows, the unification of Italy was often seen by clergymen of the Church of England and of the Episcopal Church in England and the United States not so much as an opportunity for mass conversions but as one for the reform and transformation of the Catholic Church. This, however, was another resounding failure. Papal primacy became even more strongly affirmed and Roman Catholicism remained entrenched in the life of the peninsula, despite the new Italian state's measures to deprive it of its privileged status.

Villani provides a rich appendix to the text that compares sections of the Book of Common Prayer in the different Italian language translations and their revised versions. This is a welcome addition that documents the forms the text took throughout the centuries. Villani's book is novel in several ways. It charts the efforts to disseminate the Book of Common Prayer in the Italian language and to achieve a spiritual conquest of the Italian Peninsula by the Church of England, and it provides readers with a history of the often-troubled Italian Protestant community in England and how the translation of the prayer book served to disseminate the Italian language in England. Transcultural in scope, this monograph will surely be of interest to scholars of early modern Italy and Britain, Religious Studies, and Catholic and Protestant history. Painstakingly researched with archival sleuthing undertaken in several countries and taking into account the most up-to-date scholarship in the various fields it brings together, Stefano Villani's book should be rightly greeted as a fine addition to the relevant bibliography on its subject and for shedding light on episodes and personalities which hitherto have been neglected.

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