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# Courts and Courtly Cultures in Early Modern Italy and Europe

Models and Languages

Edited by  
Simone Albonico and Serena Romano

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## Foreword

The symposium “Courts and Courtly Cultures in Early Modern Italy and Europe. Models and Languages” was the last phase of Sinergia “Constructing Identity: visual, spatial, and literary cultures in Lombardy, 14<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries”, a project bringing together five research teams from four different Swiss universities – Lausanne, Geneva, Zurich, and Lausanne EPFL. It was an opportunity to take stock of the work done, and present the results. It also placed the research within the wider international context of those studies in the field which have played a fundamental role for our project too. The presence of so many scholars was proof of the topicality, better still of the growing relevance of these themes. Although set in a definite historical period, they lie at the heart of studies about the cultural dynamics of the past and the present.

The core of the project developed in the symposium were the forms of propaganda and self-representation, through words and images, during the rise of the ‘civiltà delle corti’. A special attention has been reserved to processes typical of the time, such as confrontation, adaptation, competition and rivalry. This period, which marked the passage of Italian and European culture from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, according to many authoritative opinions is fundamental in the development of Modern Europe, and it lasted up to the XVIII century and beyond. At the heart of many matters debated lies the relationship between culture and politics. The formation of a ‘Lombard identity’, central to the Sinergia project, is closely linked to this broad general context. It places the so called ‘questione milanese’ – above the traditional hierarchies ‘Toscana oriented’ – at the centre of many questions regarding Northern Italy as a whole, starting from the dissolution of the Medieval communes, through to the rise of the *signorie* (from the end of the XIII century and the beginning of the XIV century up at least to the early XVI century).

It would be difficult and perhaps even pretentious to draw up a list of the themes discussed in the symposium. The scholars who took part in it belong to different specific areas: they were not only historians in the strict sense, but also authorities in the field of history of literature and of humanism, history of music, history of architecture and of the visual arts. This was not only a question of methodology. The synergy was made possible by the presence of a common denominator – the histori-

cal period. The same wide-ranging themes sometimes appeared more than once in the papers, demonstrating the need to examine them from different viewpoints. In any case, they all showed, without exception, how compartmentalization into different research fields is now no longer possible. The very concept of ‘the interdisciplinary approach’, so often repeated in the humanities and particularly in history, has become commonplace. No sphere of study is completely independent from its neighbours. There is a close dialogue among them: critical instruments are shared, subject matters often coincide, viewpoints are similar, though not identical.

The common ground, in our case, centres on the early rise of the concept of ‘person’ – that is of the ‘individual’ – both in politics and literature, and in the arts (Vale, Maire-Vigueur, Gamberini). This is particularly true for early Renaissance humanism, starting from Petrarch and his reception (Fumagalli, Viti). Chivalric myths and values still persist (Vale), a thread which has proved vital to our research. Over the years, starting from the heroic times of the Visconti, sophisticated instruments of persuasion and self-representation were developed. They imply carefully founded ‘constructions of history’ (Busch, Chiesa, Viti) and of image (Majocchi, Zaru, Martinis, Comboni), whose anthropological origins are analysed in an interesting case study by Bedos-Rezak. The Lombard question, as already mentioned, is strictly linked to the rest of Northern Italy, by virtue of geographical contiguity and political affinity. On this point, see, above all, Varanini on Verona and Viti on Milan’s traditional ‘rival’ – Florence. Broader geographical perspectives are provided by Gardner, Bock and Campbell. Death rituals and funeral rites are, without doubt, a revealing expression of these practices of power and communication (Majocchi, Folin and Bock); many papers deal with the dynamics of patronage, particularly those by Gardner, Novelli and Zaru, and this is a common theme in many, very different research fields. Maria Caraci’s paper focuses on music, which played a fundamental role in court life, both with the Visconti and with the Sforza; and Marco Limongelli’s is about vernacular court poetry. In both cases not much is now extant, so that patient reconstructions, an almost archaeological care, and guarded interpretations are required.

This volume is the last of a book series entitled ‘Studi lombardi’, drawing on the Sinergia Project and published by Viella. However, ‘Studi lombardi’ will not stop here. PhD theses based on the project, together with other related studies and research, are expected to become part of it in the future. Our hope is that they will show how vital this field is, the full breadth of which it was impossible to cover in these few years, despite being supported by excellent scholars and contributors, and generously sponsored by the Fonds National Suisse de la Recherche Scientifique. The support of the Faculté des Lettres has proved essential over the years. Currently eight different conference proceedings have been published. Such a huge amount of scholarly work and of generous contributions by friends and colleagues is unusual in a short research span of just four years. We hope that all this will go on, under different forms and thanks to a new generation of young scholars, as fascinated by these problems as we are.