

**Massimo Rospocher, *Il papa guerriero:  
Giulio II nello spazio pubblico europeo***

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In the past twenty years, scholars working on the Italian Renaissance have become particularly responsive to the advantages of bringing interdisciplinary approaches to the analysis of fifteenth- and sixteenth- century texts and ideas. Some of the most influential studies in this direction are Lauro Martines's 2001 investigation of literature as historical record, and Peter Burke and Po-chia Hsia's 2007 call for historians to consider translation studies as an important prism through which to study past cultures and texts.<sup>1</sup> Several projects have recently explored the intersections between scribal and print, oral and written cultures in medieval and early modern Italy, with a particular focus on political communication.<sup>2</sup> For a long time, these realms have, in effect, been kept separate. Thanks to these recent studies, historians, musicologists, literary scholars and those focused on the history of ideas have begun to work towards a more nuanced understanding of how the performance of ideas, texts, and orality interacted and influenced each other.

Massimo Rospocher's new study is an outstanding contribution in this line of scholarship. In his book, he shows convincingly that historians need to consider all relevant media (oral, manuscript, printed, and visual) in order to understand the dynamics of 'public' opinion and propaganda. Rospocher offers an excellent example

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<sup>1</sup> LAURO MARTINES, *Strong Words: Writing and Social Strain in the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), and PETER BURKE and R. PO-CHIA HSIA, *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> *I Tatti Studies*, special issue edited by GEORGIA CLARKE and FABRIZIO NEVOLA on "The Experience of the Street in Early Modern Italy", 16 (1/2) 2014, 47-229; LUCA DEGL'INNOCENTI, BRIAN RICHARDSON, and CHIARA SBORDONI (eds.), *Interactions Between Orality and Writing in Early Modern Italian Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); "Oral Culture in Early Modern Italy: Performance, Language, Religion", special issue of *The Italianist*, 34.3 (2014), edited by STEFANO DALL'AGLIO, LUCA DEGL'INNOCENTI, BRIAN RICHARDSON, MASSIMO ROSPOCHER, and CHIARA SBORDONI; ELIZABETH HORODOWICH, *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and "Speech and Oral Culture in Early Modern Europe and Beyond", special issue of *The Journal of Early Modern History*, 16 (4), 2012, edited by ELIZABETH HORODOWICH. Further afield, key studies on orality and written practices include HAROLD LOVE, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and DONALD F. MCKENZIE, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For a fuller list of recent studies on orality, print, and performance in early modern Italy see *Interactions Between Orality*, 22-3.

of how this can be achieved by examining propaganda pro and against Pope Julius II in the turbulent years 1507-13.

*Il papa guerriero* is divided into three parts. The first concentrates on ways in which street performances, processions, and scribal and printed texts promoted the notion of a new 'golden age' under Julius II. In particular, Roman humanist culture of the era collapsed time and space by superimposing the 'new' Rome of Julius II upon the ancient Rome of Julius Caesar. The publication, translation, and dissemination of official documents, images, and chronicles also helped to promote Julius II's programme of expansion, while also stirring strong anti-papal sentiments in Bologna, Ferrara, and Venice. The pro-papal materials took several different directions, without the direct control of the pope and his court. In this part, and throughout the book, Rospocher details the complex iconographic and textual strategies employed by authors, translators, and performers to disseminate propaganda.

The second part of Rospocher's study focuses on the anti-papal propaganda which radiated from Bologna, Ferrara, and Venice, and reached beyond these cities and beyond Italy: flyers, notes or *bollettini*, rhymes, spoken hearsay spread widely despite the governments' attempt to control and punish their circulation and reception. Rospocher shows just how ubiquitous the various texts were. Recent studies have demonstrated the degree to which the government of Venice and other early modern centres were obsessed with controlling information: at times gossip, discussions, and small gatherings (called 'trebbi' in Ferrara, 'bozzoli' in Venice) in public spaces were formally 'forbidden'. Rospocher emphasises the ubiquity and unruliness of the propaganda. An insult or expression of praise reverberated across a wide range of media, each text accentuating or substituting the other. Despite their ephemeral nature, a staggering number of these documents still exist. Amongst these sources, Rospocher has unearthed a miscellany containing several cheap prints on current affairs annotated by a diplomat from Ferrara (212-3).

Part three of this volume has a European outlook, as it examines anti-papal propaganda produced in the France of Louis XII and the England of Henry VIII. Amongst libels, treatises, and histories, Rospocher explores theatre as an extremely effective means for the dissemination of political views. From orality to print and back, from Latin to vernacular and back, this third part of the book demonstrates the multidirectionality of political ideas, and their reach for the benefit of different audiences and agents.

The breadth of documentary, literary, and visual texts examined by Rospocher is impressive. Whether referring to the ballads or *sonetti* by *cantimbanchi*, or to lavish miniatures of codices owned by the Este family of Ferrara or Anne of Brittany, Rospocher demonstrates powerfully how early Cinquecento political propaganda was generated, disseminated, and internalised by rulers, professionals of the pen, street performers, and audiences. These texts were not all produced by means of concerted,

fully-controlled processes of textual and visual production. Instead, pro-papal texts by humanists, professionals of the pen, politicians, street performers looking for easy financial gain, astrologists, and similar merchants of culture often spurred the production of more texts, often in conflict with each other, and targeting different audiences. Such a process points to an uncontrollable ‘ripple effect’ that Rospocher has captured and examined masterfully.

In particular, this volume sheds light on the communication strategies directly and indirectly employed by Pope Julius II—and the ensuing anti-papal media campaign unleashed by the Este and Bentivoglio rulers, and the Republic of Venice—to curb dissent and promote a positive image of the leader of the Church. ‘Political propaganda’ is an anachronistic term in the context of a pre-ideological society, as Rospocher remarks at the outset of his work. Similarly, Habermas’s utopic understanding of the ‘public sphere’ eschews the extremely dynamic, conflicting, and unpredictable nature of the early modern public space (22-25). To this end, Rospocher suggests that the Italian *piazza* of the early sixteenth century may be seen as the space in which the rhetoric of power, the performance of consensus and dissent, and the dissemination of texts visibly converged and, in some cases, clashed. Rospocher’s multimedial approach allows for identification of a much broader spectrum of cultural and political authors, actors, and audiences. The hybridity of media such as pamphlets, street performances, and illuminated manuscripts made possible the dissemination of their content across space, texts, and audiences. Rospocher’s use of Klaus Bruhn Jensen’s three-tiered notion of intermediality is particularly effective, since it gives due consideration to the intertextual, intersemiotic, and institutional nature of political communication.

The outcome is a lively, engaging, and memorably rich account of the production, dissemination, and exchange of Julius II’s image and propaganda. Through an enthralling discussion of woodcuts, etchings, miniatures, chronicles, letters, pamphlets, calendars, and poems, Rospocher illuminates the political and iconographic programme of Julius II and its reception across complex social and textual strata. More broadly, this study inspires further research on the interaction, in early modern Western cultures, between official and ephemeral communication, cultural production and reception, and between textual and visual sources.

Lastly, this study can be described as fascinating for its contribution towards a more nuanced approach to the study of early modern texts and artefacts. The interconnectedness of often ephemeral materials points to Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood’s notion of the ‘anachronic’. By this they intend that texts often transcend their historical context. In the case of the material discussed by Rospocher, the dialogue between early sixteenth-century media illuminates how rulers and citizens

respond to violence, famine, propaganda, and the passing of time.<sup>3</sup> This is why, as Rospocher's study suggests, Raphael's frescoes in the *Stanze* (commissioned by Julius II) are most revealingly studied together with the miniatures of Giovanni Nagonio and the *vox populi* interpreted by anonymous sonnets and invectives. The propaganda created for and against pope Julius II was designed by an individual or by a group of individuals at a specific historical moment, but it also points forward 'to all its future recipients who will activate and reactivate it as a meaningful event'.<sup>4</sup> Rospocher invites his readers to activate and explore the immanent dynamics of propaganda and public opinion.

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<sup>3</sup> ALEXANDER NAGEL and CHRISTOPHER S. WOOD, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> NAGEL and WOOD, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 9.