INDIANA UNIVERSITY (HTTPS://WWW.IU.EDU)

Medieval Review Support Fund

GIVE NOW (http://go.iu.edu/1T8K)

Information

For Readers (https://scholarworks/journals/index.php/tmr/information/readers)

For Librarians (https://scholarworks/journals/index.php/tmr/information/librarians)

Open Journal Systems (http://pkp.sfu.ca/ojs/)

19.11.05 Facio, La Conquista de Nápoles

The Medieval Review (http://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr) 19.11.05

Facio, Bartolomeo. Ed. trans. Ana-Isabel Magallón. *Facio, La Conquista de Nápoles [1455]: Los diez libros de las hazañas del Rey Alfonso* . Zaragoza: Institución Fernando el Católico, 2017. pp. 462. ISBN: 978-84-9911-469-9 (paperback).

Reviewed by:
Ronald G. Musto
University of Bristol
rg.musto@bristol.ac.uk (mailto:rg.musto@bristol.ac.uk)

The Aragonese period (1442-1504) of the Kingdom of Naples has been a major focus of historians and art historians for the past two generations. While medieval Naples has only recently begun to draw Anglophone researchers and audience, the Aragonese have received thorough attention and highly regarded study. George Hersey, Jerry Bentley, translations of Beccadelli, Manetti, Pontano, Sannazaro, and Valla in the I Tatti series have been landmarks in their fields. Most recently the Cambridge University Press volume *Naples*, edited by Marcia B. Hall and Thomas Willette in the *Artistic Centers of the Italian Renaissance* series brought together American and Continental scholars in a comprehensive treatment of the current state of research. Meanwhile, Continental scholarship has a long and deep tradition of high-quality work, especially among Italian and Spanish researchers.

Scholarship has covered almost all aspects of the cultural, political, and socio-economic history of Aragonese Naples; but it remains fair to say that the majority of studies continue to focus on Alfonso I (V of Aragon) both as the founder of the dynasty and as emblematic of certain general trends of Aragonese rule in Naples. These include the creation of an early-modern state; new attention to urban planning and development; the role of the monarch as projection of majesty, personification of magnanimity, and Machiavellian statesman; the impact of humanism on the verbal and the visual; the precarious nature of Aragonese rule amid a constantly shifting Italian balance of power; and the starring role of the Neapolitan Regno in the drama of*fortuna* so key to humanist understanding of the life of individuals and realms.

In this context Ana-Isabel Magallón's Spanish translation of Bartolomeo Facio's *Rerum gestarum Alfonsi regis libri X* is a welcome addition both to the growing

corpus of Neapolitan sources and to contemporary scholarship on the Aragonese Regno. Magallón, professor of Latin Philology at the Universidad de Zaragoza, provides an ample and informative introduction, a synopsis of each of Facio's ten books, a complete Spanish translation of his *Rerum gestarum* (based on Daniela Pietragalla's 2004 critical edition of the Latin text with facing Italian translation), generous and up-to-date notes and bibliography, and onomastic and toponymic indices. The*Rerum gestarum* covers the years 1420 to 1455, from the reign of Giovanna II of Anjou-Durazzo to the Peace of Lodi and Nicholas V's crusade call. There is no English-language edition.

Bartolomeo Facio is best known to scholars of humanism and early modern Europe as the chief antagonist of Lorenzo Valla at the court of Naples. Along with Antonio Beccadelli (Panormita), Giannozzo Manetti, and Giovanni Pontano, Facio made Aragonese Naples an important center of humanist thought. He shared with his fellow humanists a wide-ranging interest in classical letters, in ancient and modern historiography, in ethical and philosophical thought, in contemporary affairs, and in reflections on good government and rulers. Born in La Spezia c.1405 into a family of notaries, he studied in Verona under Guarino and soon became tutor for the children of Doge Francesco Foscari of Venice. He spent most of the 1420s and 1430s in Florence, and then in Lucca, Milan, and Genoa, where he eventually served as an ambassador, traveling to Naples in 1443. There Panormita persuaded him to join King Alfonso's service in 1445. He was appointed royal historiographer in 1446, and by 1451 he had begun the *Rerum gestarum.* Facio presented his completed work in April 1455. He followed this with his *De viris illustribus* and with translations of ancient Greek works. He died in Naples toward the end of 1457.

Magallón provides an important supplement to Pietragalla's authoritative edition. She deploys the best current scholarship from both Anglophone and Continental research to discuss Facio's intellectual formation, his career at the court of Naples, his brand of royal historiography and its antecedents. Her well informed and useful analysis of the *Rerum gestarum* then covers Facio's classical sources, especially Caesar's *Commentarii* for language and style and Livy for narrative structure--including a division into ten books--and Sallust and Plutarch for other models of narrative, plot, and character. This leads to a discussion of the structure and contents of the *Rerum gestarum,* with a book-by-book summary, in which Magallón demonstrates her mastery of the latest theoretical work on authorship, reception, and diffusion. This reviewer found especially noteworthy Magallón's analysis of Facio's use of literary tropes to amplify his portrait of Alfonso, a common enough practice in both trecento and early modern Italian historiography, but one in which Facio specifically draws on contemporary Italian authors, such as Boccaccio. Also of value to specialists will be Magallón's discussion of Facio's historiographical theories, his application of humanist ideas of *fortuna*, and his small treatise *De pictoribus* (the chapter on Alberti) from his *De viris illustribus*, in which he analyzes the work of contemporary Italian and Flemish painters--a special interest of Alfonso's--and lays out his theory of ekphrasis. She highlights Alfonso's own role in supervising Facio's composition and casts significant light on the place of royal patronage in the humanist enterprise. She then moves on to a useful summary of manuscripts, printed editions, and translations. Her basic bibliography reflects the more popular intent of this volume, aimed at Spanish-speaking students and general, educated readers. It thus contains few Anglophone studies or works of advanced literary and historical theory. Her notes, however, do include this most advanced research in abundance and will be of great service to specialists.

We should make a few comments on Magallón's translation and its guiding principles. As she explains in her introduction (63), she has attempted to retain

Facio's classical language in the sense used by Caesar, Cicero, or Livy. She employs footnotes to explain difficult sections and her translation choices. We have examined two sections, comparing Magallón's translation to Pietragalla's Latin edition. The first is from the Proemium (71-72). The translator generally opens up the more terse classical Latin used by Facio to accommodate a modern vernacular style, which gives a ratio of about 1/1.5 Latin to Spanish. Her translation is fortunately not a literal trot but good, contemporary exposition. This nonetheless does not stray from Facio's Caesarian economy and attractive directness, what Panormita described as Facio's "opus elegans, purum, suave et pervenustum" (37).

Facio's technical excursus on modern weaponry (VI.75-81, pp. 232-234) mirrors Caesar's geographical excursus in the *Commentarii*and offers the second example. It provides further insight into Facio's linguistic choices and avoidance of neologisms (37-41) and is an excellent touchstone for Magallón's own language choice. Facio takes great lengths here to describe fifteenth-century weaponry, including canon (*tormenta*) and canon ball (*saxum rotundum*), for example; but he does so deliberately avoiding contemporary words like *bombarda* or other neologisms recommended by Valla ("nova res novum vocabulum flagitat," 39), instead using classical Latin terms that need considerable explanation and verbiage to make clear sense. For one piece of deadly artillery, Facio does use a term already in common usage among the Spanish—*colubrina*--and here Magallón speculates (233 n.427) that he did so to demonstrate his knowledge of modern vernacular and to emphasize his own classical choices elsewhere. Magallón chooses to abandon such antiquarian form and translates Facio's Latin into contemporary Spanish with sufficient explanatory annotation.*Tormenta* becomes *artilleria,* for example, while *saxum rotundum* remains *piedra redonda*. On the whole, her choices favor ease of reading and understanding, and this fits the purpose of her edition: an accessible text, well supported by her own commentary, analysis, and use of secondary scholarship that will lead a general audience into an important historical text.

Finally a few words on Francis Meléndez's illustrations. These offer a stylized and whimsical map of early modern Italy, a reinterpretation of the famous view of Naples c.1465 in the *Tavola Strozzi* (a welcome change from the original's overuse in Neapolitan studies), a portrait of Alfonso, and a dedicatory poem imitating a royal Aragonese manuscript. Their popular style reminds one of the graphics sometimes used by the mid-century *Horizon Magazine.* Their intent is obviously the same: to attract a broad, educated audience to a significant text and its context and to make the historical tradition alive and relevant. While the social context and impact of publications like *Horizon* have been lost in the United States, happily they remain strong in Europe. Ana-Isabel Magallón's translation of Bartolomeo Facio's *Rerum gestarum Alfonsi regis libri X* is an excellent example of first-rate scholarship that reaches out to a broad and educated audience.

Issue

2019 Reviews (https://scholarworks.iu.edu/journals/index.php/tmr/issue/view/1857)

Section

Reviews

0