

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Erdmann, Axel, Alberto Govi, and Fabrizio Govi. *Ars Epistolica: Communication in Sixteenth Century Western Europe: Epistolaries, Letter-Writing Manuals and Model Letter Books 1501–1600*. Intro. Judith Rice Henderson

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What is the audience of this edition? The masterful German translation makes this important text for the first time accessible to a larger audience and not only to those skilled in Latin. This is to be lauded. However, the exorbitant price of this book, although it may be justified by the high quality printing and binding, makes its use in the university classroom all but impossible and raises doubts that the book will ever find a larger audience, even among scholars. Vitoria's Latin is not very challenging, so scholars of legal and political philosophy, for most of whom German is not a first language, will rightly continue to use Beltrán de Heredia's Latin edition of Vitoria's lectures until they are presented with a new edition that also promises progress on the philological details of the Latin text.

MARTIN PICKAVÉ

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**Erdmann, Axel, Alberto Govi, and Fabrizio Govi.**

*Ars Epistolica: Communication in Sixteenth Century Western Europe: Epistolaries, Letter-Writing Manuals and Model Letter Books 1501–1600.*

**Intro. Judith Rice Henderson.**

Luzern: Gilhofer & Ranschburg GmbH / Modena: Libreria Alberto Govi di Fabrizio Govi Sas, 2014. Pp. xxv, 771. ISBN 978-3-033-04329-9 (hardcover) €150.

*Ars Epistolica* seeks to expand the chronological boundaries of the Republic of Letters—and Jürgen Habermas's ideas of the public sphere—by exposing the complex art of letters that existed in sixteenth-century Europe. In so doing, *Ars Epistolica* helps bring the art of letters into line with recent historical work that has sought to expand the chronological boundaries of the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment periods. *Ars Epistolica* uses comprehensive bibliographic lists to counter the claims that the Republic of Letters began in the eighteenth century. At the centre of this book lie the titles of hundreds of printed volumes of letter collections and instruction manuals on letter writing. It makes for a convincing argument that the Republic of Letters was already well established by the beginning of the sixteenth century.

The introduction by Judith Rice Henderson provides a broad overview of the art of letters in the sixteenth century, as well as summarizing the changing

modes of writing correspondence. Her overview begins with a discussion of the medieval modes of letter writing and their origin in the twelfth century. Over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, this medieval fashion gave way to imitations of the style of Cicero, then recently rediscovered. Rice observes that the art of letter writing went through another transition in the sixteenth century as the Ciceronian style gave way to the more flexible Ramist mode of writing developed by humanists (xvi). Rice also notes that the collection and publication of letters demonstrates that letters were more than merely a conveyance of personal news; they were considered important works of literature. Whether intended that way or not, letters communicated information to more people than merely the addressed recipient.

Broadly speaking, *Ars Epistolica* is divided into three parts. The majority of the book is taken up by the first part, which provides detailed summaries of the letter collections printed in the sixteenth century. The publication history of each individual work gives some idea of the significance of the collections. The short biographies of the authors—and occasionally, the printers—provide a view of the diverse disciplines of these sixteenth-century men of letters. The available modern commentary on each work is also provided (if only in its original language of publication, due to space concerns). Finally, there is a list of every letter contained in each collection: including, where possible, author, recipient, and when and where the letter was written. The second and third parts, to supplement the first, include complete bibliographies of printed collections of letters and letter-writing manuals of the sixteenth century, acting as pseudo-appendices to the work done in the first part.

Naturally, this book appeals to scholars studying the Republic of Letters. Yet any scholar dealing with notable and lettered individuals of the sixteenth century would be well advised to peruse the index of the authors and recipients. The diversity of names that appear in the work testifies to the importance of the art of letter writing in sixteenth-century communication, as well as the diversity of interests of the “Renaissance Man.”

*Ars Epistolica* is in some small way a response to modern information technology—not least, because the book is dedicated to the art of letter writing. As Henderson notes in the introduction, the art of letters has quickly disappeared with the ability to communicate using email snippets (vii). The content and layout of the book also suggest a reaction of sorts against computers. The material contained in *Ars Epistolica* is of a type that could easily have been the

source data for a computerized database, where the user would easily be able to find the small set of data they were specifically looking for. By putting this information in book form, the reader is forced to confront far more information than the output of a search engine. Scanning through the long lists of names provides ample opportunity for serendipitous discovery in a way databases cannot offer. Books are bulkier and more cluttered in their transmission of information than computers, but this clutter also carries valuable information; it may not have direct or immediate use, but it is information nonetheless. In its execution, *Ars Epistolica* reminds the reader that while computers are useful tools, they have their limits as a medium of research.

*Ars Epistolica* is unquestionably a reference work featuring a bibliographic catalogue of the art of letter writing in sixteenth-century Europe. Even in appearance, this seven-hundred-plus page folio-sized hardcover impresses the fact that this book is not light reading. Nor is any but the most specialized historian likely to make daily use of this work. As a result, *Ars Epistolica* will not likely find its way into many personal collections; however, any scholar of sixteenth-century Europe would do well to consult this book from time to time. For this reason, *Ars Epistolica* is a fine acquisition for any collection at an institution where sixteenth-century scholars are found.

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**Ferrer, Véronique.**

*Exercices de l'âme fidèle. La littérature de piété en prose dans le milieu réformé francophone (1524–1685).*

Genève : Librairie Droz, 2014. 370 p. ISBN 978-2-600-01746-6 (broché) 61.61 €.

Cette monographie témoigne de l'expertise de son auteure dans les domaines de la théologie et de l'histoire littéraire, ainsi que de la poétique et de la rhétorique. Professeure à l'Université Bordeaux III, Véronique Ferrer a déjà publié de nombreux articles au sujet de la littérature réformée des seizième et dix-septième siècles. Elle a également édité, avec Anne Mantero, un volume impressionnant sur la paraphrase biblique à cette même époque (*Les Paraphrases bibliques aux XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles*. Genève : Librairie Droz, 2006). Dans *Exercices de l'âme*