

## Reconstructing a lost library

### The last marchese of Finale and his lost books

Recensione di: Anna Giulia Cavagna, *La biblioteca di Alfonso del Carretto Marchese di Finale. Libri tra Vienna e la Liguria nel XVI secolo*, Finale Ligure, Centro Storico Finalese, 2012, 430 p., ISBN: 9788890166921, € 20,00.

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In this study Anna Giulia Cavagna, an established book historian at the University of Genoa, describes the book collection of the last ruler of Finale, Alfonso II del Carretto (1525-1583), departing from a sixteenth-century manuscript entitled 'Nota de varij libri delle libreria de Marchesi di Finale' (List of the various books in the library of the marquis of Finale). This list records the different parcels of books sent by del Carretto from Vienna to Finale between 1558 and 1583 in exceptional detail. Cavagna provides a full transcription of this unique document and a bibliographic description of the 1,083 entries. Yet her work is more than a bibliographic study; in additional chapters Cavagna discusses the *Nota* in detail and reconstructs the particular story of del Carretto's career and his books.

Alfonso II del Carretto was the marquis of Finale, a small imperial fief in Liguria bordering the Republic of Genoa. In 1558 the Genoese supported a popular uprising against Alfonso II, who subsequently fled to the imperial court in Vienna. He briefly returned to Finale in 1564 but in 1566, after another revolt against his authority, he returned to Vienna. He spent the rest of his life trying to reclaim his territory with the help of the Holy Roman Emperors. Hoping to create his own library, Alfonso II started to acquire many books in Vienna which were then subsequently sent to Finale. But he never returned; he remained in exile in Vienna until his death in 1583. The marquisate was then sold to the Spanish, who moved the documents and presumably also the library to nearby Milan. The list of shipments of the books is the only document left for a reconstruction of the library.

Cavagna describes the physical characteristics of the document at great lengths. The document was compiled in Vienna by different secretaries. They recorded the books with a particular eye to detail, which was rather unusual for inventories of libraries at that time. The compilers transcribed the information from the title pages and colophons fully and carefully and often gave information on the book bindings. Due to this wealth of information Cavagna is in most cases able to identify the specific editions dell Carretto acquired. When the entries in the *Nota* are less specific she still tries to identify the potential editions he might have bought, but it is not entirely clear on which grounds some of the editions are included and others are not. The list has brief inserts on how these parcels of books were sent and gives us information about agents and intermediaries involved in the transportation

of the books. Other objects, such as armour, weapons and paintings were sent along with the books, but these objects are not described in as much detail.

An interesting and unique characteristic of the *Nota* is that it records paratextual elements such as the patrons and dedicatees, as well as the printing privilege and indexes of the books. According to Cavagna, the dedicatees are only mentioned in the *Nota* when it concerns noblemen. In many ways Carretto's preoccupation with social status reflected his own struggle for political recognition at the Habsburg court in Vienna. Cavagna argues throughout her study that Carretto built a princely and learned library as a crucial instrument to represent his authority. He was particularly interested in accumulating material on the illustrious military deeds of his forbearers. He also bought many books on genealogy, recent history and law. Unfortunately a thorough and detailed analysis of content is not part of this book. Cavagna writes that this will be the subject of another separate study. Nevertheless, this is a fascinating study of an exiled well-educated marquis, who bought books as part of a campaign to re-establish his political authority, and presents us with interesting perspectives on the mechanisms of buying, recording and collecting books.

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