Monica Azzolini and Isabella Lazzarini, editors. *Italian Renaissance Diplomacy: A Sourcebook*. Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 2017. Pp. 300. ISBN 9780888445667.

The book aims at giving English readers a broad range of Italian Renaissance diplomatic sources, covering the period from 1350 to 1520. It immediately demonstrates its usefulness for both students and learned scholars; in fact, in the first pages, one can learn the basis of how the world of diplomacy worked; how to keep sent or received letters; what a *minuta* and a *filza* are; the language of letters; and the difference between *nuntius* and *orator*. Then, following the three thematic sections, the reader gets a broader idea of all the many aspects that an act of diplomacy puts into play. Each chapter is opened by a brief introduction, followed by a small anthology of carefully contextualized translated texts; an essential bibliography is also provided. The texts are accompanied by short explanatory footnotes.

In the first section, “Diplomacy,” the authors show all the preparatory work needed for a diplomatic mission, from the choice of the right ambassador to the precise instructions to give him. The increasing importance of the ambassador’s role also implied a change in the contents and forms of these texts (Chap. 1). When the envoy reached his destination, he had “three main duties: representation, negotiation, and information” (42). But, before going deeper inside the world of diplomacy, the volume lets the reader vividly imagine the context in which the missions took place: the size of rooms; the number of spectators; embassies’ structures and languages; gifts exchanged with local rulers; and “diplomatic rituals” (28) that were in vogue until envoys turned unto resident ambassadors, in the second half of the sixteenth century (2). For this reason, too, final reports to the patron, which were initially only oral, slowly became written, and they had to include not only the official content of the embassy, but all the useful information gathered during the stay abroad (Chap. 4).

The second section, “Politics,” goes deeper into the embassies’ content. Of course, war is the main theme of the diplomatic activity of that period (Chap. 5), due to the instability of the Italian political situation, with the papal power in central Italy and the numerous little states in both the north and south, which were often beset by conflicts between factions. In fact, “few societies can have been prone to nurturing factions of every kind as the political society” of Renaissance Italy (116). Moreover, local factions could give rise to networks of factions, such as

the Guelphs and Ghibellines, and landed nobles traditionally identified themselves through their membership to one faction or another (Chap. 7). Thus, envoys had to be well informed about an unstable local political situation. Conversely, the diplomacy of the stable papacy offers an interesting perspective of research, with its characteristic intertwining ecclesiastical interests and political alliances of secular powers. However, it changed its nature as did the other diplomacies, even if it was slower in stablishing permanent embassies and quicker in hosting resident ambassadors (Chap. 6). Chapter 7 shows the role of women in dealing with power. Women could act as informal ambassadors or could be objects of political interest, since they had to be good at being wives and, above all, at procreating. Diplomatic letters reveal what they were expected to do and how they were expected to be: beautiful, virtuous, and fertile. Finally, we learn that rituals played a prominent role in all diplomatic steps, and that each public action was “highly scrutinized, codified, and regulated” (150). Both envoys and rulers had to be able to correctly read and perform these rituals: which clothes to wear; whether to stand or sit; how to organize parties and receptions; how to always be attentive to the status of visitors (Chap. 9).

The third section, “Society and Culture,” widens the gaze to other disciplines. First, historians of crime usually do not consider diplomatic correspondences as a good source of information. However, ambassadors could see in person what happened, report news, and, above all, bring “criminal justice into the system of patronage” (176), securing favourable treatments of co-citizens (Chap. 10). Second, since the Renaissance was an age of journeys towards the East, as well as towards the West, envoys’ letters prove that these meetings were the occasion for new exchanges; new artistic and cultural influences; but also for economic concern: the ambassadors’ exchanges “reflect this increased awareness of the diversity of global cultures” (193). Moreover, since “the right gift might make the difference between success and failure” (214), diplomacy was strictly related to visual and material culture: clothing (colour and emblems), gifts (both Italian and exotic wares), but also frescoes that “powerfully visualized identity and political affiliation” (215). Chapter 13 deals with medicine and astrology, which played a prominent role in the precarious political system of the Italian Renaissance: sick rulers could create a good deal of concern, so they would consult doctors and astrologers throughout Italy, sending very detailed reports of their symptoms (I should note that this is the only chapter that uses common letters and not diplomatic letters). Finally, ambassadors were involved in local leisure activities, especially dancing, hunting,

and jousting; thus, diplomatic reports are a good source to better understand games and leisure activities in the Renaissance.

In conclusion, this book has a lot to teach to both English-speaking and Italian-speaking readers, since it deals with topics that are not often taught, even in Italian universities, and nevertheless underlie all the Italian Early Modern political systems. Scholars study kings and dukes, wars and peace treaties, the *Camera Picta* of Mantua, etc., but not what makes all this work: ambassadors and diplomacy. Such a particular point of view actually has very wide repercussions, that are highlighted here with acumen by the subdivision into sections and chapters, which show all the links and implications that diplomacy has with other disciplines, such as history of crime, art, architecture, clothing, language, women studies, literature, religion, language, and material culture: everything has something to do with letters and ambassadors.

Obviously, it would have been useful to have the original texts next to the translation, but it is easy to imagine the editorial reasons for this exclusion. I am left with the wish that the book had explored further the sixteenth century, so that readers could understand if and how the ambassador's role changed with the decay of the Italian courts, the wars between Charles V and Francis I, and the sack of Rome.

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Jane Everson, Denis V. Reidy, and Lisa Sampson, editors. *The Italian Academies: 1525–1700. Networks of Culture, Innovation and Dissent*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2016. Pp. 348. ISBN 97819099662575.

This volume presents 18 essays that go a long way to rectify the bias of many early critics and goes beyond the encyclopaedic approach of Michele Maylender's *Storia delle accademie d'Italia*. The collection surveys with breadth and detail and with new archival research the rise and affirmation of the academic movement and the vital role academies played in developing culture, political and scholarly debate, and intellectual networks in Italy from the 1500s to 1700.

Jane Everson, Denis V. Reidy, and Lisa Sampson's Introduction provides a workable definition of the academy as "a kind of society that termed itself thus