

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Maschietto, Francesco Ludovico. Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia (1646–1684): The First Woman in the World to Earn a University Degree. Trans. Jan Vairo and William Crochetiere. Ed. Catherine Marshall

Laura Prelipcean

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thought. In his *Summa* the good archbishop in fact relied point by point on the Venetian writer, Henry of Rimini, whose *Liber de quattuor virtutibus cardinalibus ad cives Venetos* (ca. 1300) he duly cited—although prior to Howard no one bothered to check the citation. So much for modern scholarship's compulsive search for originality—a search that often obscures what is historically important in a text. The Antoninus that emerges in Howard's study is appreciated not as a sparkling theoretician but as a responsive and engaged preacher and a theologian who drew upon the rich and diverse theological tradition in which he had been schooled with style and care. One understands why the Florentines liked him.

WILLIAM J. CONNELL, *Seton Hall University*

**Maschietto, Francesco Ludovico.**

***Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia (1646–1684): The First Woman in the World to Earn a University Degree.* Trans. Jan Vairo and William Crochetiere. Ed. Catherine Marshall.**

Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2007. Pp. xxii, 318. ISBN 978-0-9161-0157-2 (hardcover) \$40.

Francesco Ludovico Maschietto's book makes a worthy contribution to an expanding genre of literature concerned with women's biographies in the early modern period. Exquisitely researched, and intended primarily for the academic community, it successfully finds ways to communicate its content to the broader public interested in early modern learning. Although Elena Lucrezia Cornaro Piscopia was the subject of previous scholarly research, this was the first extensive study in Italian—here translated into English—that focuses exclusively on her life. This volume has the merit of unearthing a number of unpublished documents on Elena and of giving an overview of the seventeenth-century Venetian social, cultural, and educational milieu.

Using evidence from archival documents, Maschietto meticulously reconstructs Elena's life and provides valuable insights into her private and academic world. The book is organized into nine chapters, which comprise two areas of

focus: the Cornaro Piscopia family—their political, economic, and cultural role in Venice—and Elena's life and education.

The first three chapters examine the Cornaro Piscopia family, tracing their roots and their social and political relations. We are also given insights into their public, cultural, administrative, and military roles within the Republic of Venice. Chapter 1 discusses the Cornaro Piscopia lineage and its members' tight connections with the Venetian Republic and also with the rest of Italy and Europe. The second chapter is devoted to the nobleman and procurator Giovanni Battista Cornaro, Elena's father, and focuses on his public and private life. In 1631 he became the legal guardian of his underage brothers and sisters and was responsible for administering the family's estate. Later on, he served as a commissioner and was in charge of overseeing the local administration as well as the judicial practices. As we note in chapter 3, culture was of outmost importance in the Cornaro Piscopia family. Its members were cultivators and patrons of arts and sciences and were held in high esteem by the learned elite with whom they had close relationships. The author gives detailed accounts of several figures, including Marcantonio, Giacomo Alvise, Girolamo, and Giovanni Battista Cornaro.

The second part of this book, chapters 4 to 9, examines Elena's studies and her academic interests, such as literature, science, philosophy, theology, music, and Hebrew. Special attention is paid to her studies during her residency in Padua, her writings, and her religious beliefs. Chapter 5 culminates with a description of Elena's doctoral defence in front of an assembly that included the vicar general, the College of Philosophers and Physicians, nobles, knights, and women. She was the first woman ever to earn a *Magistra et Doctrix Philosophiae* degree at the University of Padua, on 25 June 1678. She thus became the first woman in the world to hold a university degree in philosophy. This is undoubtedly a remarkable and unique achievement given that women of her time and place were forbidden from pursuing advanced university studies. Elena also distinguished herself in the literary field. She translated into Italian the Spanish version of *Alloquium Jesu Christi ad animam fidelem*, authored by a Carthusian monk, Giovanni Lanspergio. She wrote four academic discourses: three of them (*In lode della serenissima Repubblica e città di Venezia*, *Chi aspira ad un posto di comando deve pensare agli obblighi che ne derivano per non esporsi al pericolo di esserne travolto*, and *Esistenza di una concordia discordante nelle cose sensibili e nelle insensibili dalla quale ha origine armonica consonanza*) were published

between 1670 and 1672, while the fourth, an academic discourse on Our Lady of Sorrow composed in 1672, remains unpublished. Elena also exchanged frequent correspondence with prominent figures such as Cardinal Francesco Barberini, Pope Clement X, and Pope Innocent XI, to mention but three. Her writings displayed both careful composition and persuasive argumentation.

The volume is well organized and complemented by many photo-reproductions of maps, buildings where Elena resided, and portraits of her, of some of well-known professors who taught at the University of Padua, and of religious figures with whom she forged close bonds. It also includes illustrations of various engravings and academic records. The study concludes with an appendix that presents several letters and legal documents that belonged to the Cornaro Piscopia family.

This book successfully integrates a wide variety of source material and provides a thorough description and bibliographic analysis of Elena's life and studies. Moreover, it presents compelling new material that allows for a more nuanced reading of Elena's work than had previously been available, while contextualizing her within the vibrant academic community of the University of Padua. This recent translation of Maschietto's biography will become a standard reference for anyone interested in Elena Cornaro Piscopia's formidable erudition. It will certainly stimulate interest and continued research in this field.

LAURA PRELIPCEAN, *Concordia University*

**Murray, Jacqueline (ed.).**

***Marriage in Pre-modern Europe: Italy and Beyond.***

Essays and Studies 27. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012. Pp. 393 + 12 b/w and colour ill. ISBN 978-0-7727-2122-8 (paperback) \$32.

“Marriage” is a capacious term. It can refer to the rituals by which couples are united and to the processes and strategies by which such unions are forged. Yet it most often evokes the experience of living together as a couple over a lifetime. This interdisciplinary collection does a superb job of illuminating the various strategies—mainly those of Italian noble and urban patrician families from the