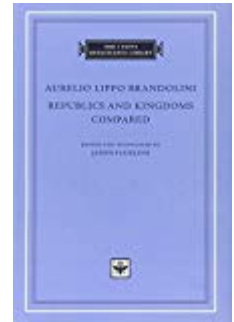


**Aurelio Lippo Brandolini.** *Republics and Kingdoms Compared*. Edited and translated by James Hankins. I Tatti Renaissance Library Series. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009. 336 pp. \$29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-03398-6.



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This review of James Hankins's edition of *Republics and Kingdoms Compared* by Aurelio Lippo Brandolini blends three methods of critique, each corresponding with a facet of the work's utility. *Republics and Kingdoms Compared* is evaluated here first as a translated work; second, as a pedagogical tool; and lastly for its academic contributions and implications for further discussion.

*Republics and Kingdoms Compared* features a three-day discussion between the Florentine merchant Domenico Giugni and the Hungarian monarch Matthias Corvinus cleverly assembled by Brandolini, a heretofore unconsidered Italian humanist from the second half of the fifteenth century, described by Hankins as "hardly in the first rank of Italian humanists" (p. ix). Born in the 1450s, the Florentine moved to Naples in 1466 where he was educated in the *studia humanitatis*. Upon completing his education he traveled in search of employment, eventually becoming what Hankins describes as an "economic exile" (p. x). While teaching in the region of current-day Budapest, Brandolini was called to serve in the court of

Matthias--elected king by Hungarian Parliament in 1458--where he received much praise by the Italian-educated monarch with a deep appreciation for humanism of the Italian Renaissance. Just before the king's death in 1490, only a few months after his arrival, Brandolini began the treatise; however, the death of his patron and the crown prince's forced abdication of rights to the throne left the writer in search for a new patron.

An attempt to gain recognition in the Medici circle by dedicating the book to Lorenzo de' Medici was thwarted by his death in 1492. In that time Brandolini was influenced by the Augustinian critic of Girolamo Savonarola, fra Mariano da Gennazzano, and subsequently died in the habit of that order in 1497, the same year that Savonarola initiated his bonfires of the vanities, a fact that also carries a hint of irony considering that the dialog featured in the work takes place during the last three evenings of Carnival, the very event that Savonarola was notoriously at odds with, prompting him to promote the bonfires as an alternative. The final edition of Brandolini's

dialog was posthumously dedicated to Giovanni de' Medici (prior to becoming Leo X) by Raffaele Brandolini. The dedication goes surprisingly unnoticed, just as it had in the previous edition written for Giovanni's father, Lorenzo.

As a translated and edited work, despite the handful of small yet noticeable typos (such as "Colucccio" rather than "Coluccio," "The" rather than "They," and "one the seven" rather than "one of the seven" [pp. xii, 129, 135, 145]), *Republics and Kingdoms Compared* lives up to the rigorous standards of the I Tatti series. Of the forty-eight volumes in the collection, Hankins has appeared as the sole editor and translator only three times--the work reviewed here and volumes 1 (2001) and 2 (2004) of Leonardo Bruni's *History of the Florentine People*. Although a supposition on the part of this reviewer, the fact may be interpreted as a testament to the significance of the treatise. In light of Hankins's statement regarding the status of Brandolini within the circles of Florentine scholarship, one wonders why it deserves the effort of translating, editing, and publishing in this prominent series. The editor's introduction to the work describes the obscurity of this piece in the literary canon. Outside of the two editions--Aurelio's for Lorenzo and Raffaele's for Giovanni--the work never circulated in print. It appears in a "passing mention in a handful of other works," an 1890 Hungarian version, a 1995 Italian translation (in an unpublished laureate thesis by Lorenza Biagini at Università degli Studi di Firenze), and in English in a single article and one unpublished master's thesis. For Hankins, "it is a work that deserves to be much better known" (p. ix).

Several challenges are highlighted in the note on text and translation section. A crucial fact is that the Latin one finds on the pages opposite those containing the English equivalent is actually derived from several sources. Hankins uses both manuscripts, referring to the copy dedicated to Lorenzo as "R" and that presented to Giovanni as "L." It is believed that R was written sometime be-

tween April 1490 and April 1492, and the latter between December 1503 and October 1511. It is assumed that each of these is an independent copy of a third, undiscovered version belonging to the author himself, and because of this many inconsistencies are noted including the spelling that is described as "idiosyncratic" (p. 267). Using the two available copies and the two modern editions--1890 and 1995--the current version is clean, consistent, and modernized following the style that has become standard for the I Tatti series. These modifications include punctuation and capitalization in addition to bracketed words or phrases added by the translator intending to complete or clarify Brandolini's sentences and ideas. Adding to the complexity is Hankins's contention with "theorists of translation who believe that technical terminology always can and should be translated using consistent referents in the target language," an argument with which Hankins disagrees and explains in a page-worth of example terms whose meanings would be marred using the "consistent referents" practice (p. 268).

The weight of these inconsistencies, uncertainties, and outright modifications should not be regarded as an impossible burden, especially considering the work's pedagogical value. The strategies employed by Hankins serve to enhance the treatise's intrinsic value. The table of contents maintains the original three-book structure with no further organization by chapters, but offers increased delineation by listing general discussion themes within each book and their corresponding page numbers, creating a look and feel that harkens back to the wonderfully detailed tables of contents of yesteryear, the ones that eventually gave way to the painstakingly thorough indices of today. The index in this volume is fairly comprehensive although it might have benefited with an expansion of its thematic references, especially for classroom use. Another convention that may become a distraction for students who are new to the genre is listing indexed items with book and line numbers indicated rather than pages. One fi-

nal note on structure is a common one, and perhaps one that is preferential; opting for end notes over footnotes makes it frustrating to consult what are otherwise very valuable annotations. This inevitably cuts down on the frequency with which they are utilized.

This book will find a home in a variety of venues. The ability to view both the Latin and English without turning a page is a high point for reasons beyond those relating to language courses in Latin. Students of history, especially those about to embark on the archival journey, will benefit from the bilingual edition more so because of Hankins's notes helping them experience, even if only in a reproduced manner, some of the difficulties commonly faced while engaged in primary source work. The notes provide ample opportunity from which teaching moments might arise, in virtually any discipline in a liberal arts curriculum, especially regarding linguistic variations in Latin over time and shifting nuances of terms and phrases.

Hankins calls Brandolini "the most interesting humanistic writer on politics before Machiavelli," and says *Republics and Kingdoms Compared* is "the most fascinating work of humanist political theory written" during that period (pp. xxv, ix). The depth of this translation's pedagogical value, however, exceeds the bounds of political philosophy. In fact, one of the most telling lines penned by Hankins is his final words in the acknowledgments: "This book is dedicated to the memory of my former teacher, Eugene F. Rice, Jr., a great scholar whose life exemplified the best republican virtues" (p. xxv). Who among today's Renaissance scholars does not also look in some way to Rice as a teacher and mentor, trendsetter, and inspiration? A fresh look at his 1958 classic, *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom*, would perhaps offer an ideal backdrop in a course using this edition. Rice provided the theoretical analysis and Hankins, his progeny, presents an epitomizing example; in tandem, these products of the same univer-

sity and press, separated by a half century, bring to life a conversation that has been captured in time by Raphael Sanzio in *The School of Athens*, completed at about the same time Raffaele Brandolini presented *Republics and Kingdoms Compared* to Giovanni de' Medici.

The book is more than an alternative, or even a companion to, Machiavelli, and it should be considered more than a means of freshening up the stale Aristotle-Hobbes-Locke-Rousseau lineup. It fulfills important objectives in its own right, namely, by presenting a snapshot of the late fifteenth-century Florentine Zeitgeist. Each book within Brandolini's work represents one of the three Carnival nights leading up to Lent and presents the debate between the king and the Florentine that took place on that particular day. The first is a discussion of kingdoms' and republics' claims to the promotion of liberty, the second on justice, and the last on effective government. Embedded in these comparisons are bits of insight about Brandolini's world which are interesting because the work in many ways can be considered a break from the norm, a nontypical example. Bearing this in mind and reading with a keen eye, one can glean elements of both the common ideologies of the Florentines and an alternative perspective of the philosophical dialogs depicted by Raphael.

One characteristic of the treatise is its theoretical assessment of government structure rather than of those individuals who in fact govern, which according to Hankins is contrary to the "humanists of the early Renaissance [who] avoided ideological confrontations over constitutional forms" (p. xii). This provides unusual exposure to commentary regarding competing forms of government administration during a time noted for its political and economic shifts culminating in a worldview that will eventually be identified as "modern." Even Brandolini's dialectic style reflects a distinct deviation from the norm, written in the form of Socratic interlocution as opposed to

“the Ciceronian dialogue form standardly used by humanists from the time of Petrarch onwards” (p. xii). In short, this literary piece may be counted as “the only example of the use of Socratic dialogue by an Italian Renaissance humanist,” demonstrating “a return to the cultural politics of Petrarch and a rejection of the neoclassical republican ideology invented in the late fourteenth century” (pp. xiii, xii). Brandolini thus brought a new vitality to the metaphorical School of Athens in Florence by providing a serious critique of the civic humanists who extolled the virtues of neo-classical republican ideology, especially that of ancient Rome.

Through the mouth of Matthias, Brandolini asserted the truths elicited from the work of Plato as far more sublime than those of Aristotle, the preferred political theorist among the Renaissance humanists. He put forth an anticolonial argument in a precolonial age, asking “What the devil is this madness anyway, sailing to the Ethiopian or Indian Ocean to pluck gems and pearls from those shores? What insanity is this, traversing the whole globe for the sake of gluttony and dissipation?” (p. 119). He commented on the merchants’ practice of arming the enemies of Christianity in the name of greed; lamented the resulting disparities between rich and poor; questioned the role of education as espoused by the civic humanists citing exceptionally bright “rustics”; criticized the common practice of employing mercenary soldiers; and disagreed with the belief that the rise of Christianity was responsible for the fall of Rome, a theory solidified by the time of Edward Gibbon’s 1776 publication, though discussed apparently as early as the fifteenth century.

Brandolini’s *Republics and Kingdoms Compared* is an apt edition for the I Tatti Renaissance Library. Its long absence from the literary canon is one to be lamented and its debut is one to be celebrated. Its relative newness on the scene, especially in pedagogical circles is enhanced by its

thematic range, its deviation from the standard style and ideological perspective, and the exposure to late fifteenth-century controversies that it provides, ultimately makes this a handy and user-friendly text sure to inspire creative and innovative discussions in the classroom and beyond.

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