

Text report: The Man of the Renaissance by Ralph Roeder
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How did the lives and backgrounds of the Authors of *The Prince* and *The Courtier* affect the perspectives of their texts?

- Niccolo Machiavelli:

This is an interesting way to look at how The Prince had been influenced by Machiavelli's upbringing and station. From Machiavelli's point of view he was more intelligent and was better able suited to make decisions that those he worked for. He prided himself on careful study and planning and accurate decisions. Throughout the book he is mind full of his position, always looking to increase his station but not taking any dangerous steps or rash decisions. It seems to me he always felt he had something to prove.

-Baldesar Castiglione:

Castiglione seemed to me much more of a lover than a fighter. In The Man of the Renaissance Ralph Roeder clearly states that his love and devotion to Duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga. Unlike Machiavelli it never seems like Castiglione feels like he needs to prove anything but his love and devotion. Perhaps this is why The Courtier talks about how great the court is and how one can be the ideal courtier (one who serves) rather than as in The Prince it showcases Machiavelli's personal knowledge of how to be a prince (one who rules.)

What lessons can we learn from this?

From Castiglione we learn of passion and the art of Sprezzatura. And from Machiavelli we see the advantages of knowledge, planning, constant goal setting, and hard dedication. Class/Birth are important but can be overcome.

This book reinforced my preference to Machiavelli vs Castiglione, Castiglione did do great things in and above serving at court, as a diplomat, or soldier but at the same time he has so much more going for him. Machiavelli was the underdog and only with his planning and knowledge did he end up where he was in life, even if the end result was not of his choosing and perhaps if one is not ruling it is much better to be loved than feared.

How can we apply those lessons in our own lives in the SCA?

We have it much easier in the SCA; I know that's stating the obvious but starting on a level playing field almost makes this an unfair advantage. On the other hand what it does do is give everyone the opportunity to get out of the SCA what they put into it. If someone just shows up to be in the game and takes for themselves they will never amount to much. However if they play with determination and passion (A virtue from Machiavelli and Castiglione respectively) they can advance themselves in the society.

I believe the best way one can apply this to the SCA is passion, Let the passion and the love of the game dictate the actions and the drive of their persona. If one wishes to impress the artisans study and show the value of what you love and if one wishes to impress with their prowess let them see the joy they take while doing what they do and teach it to others.

What is your overall impression?

I found The Man of the Renaissance to be interesting, but not an enjoyable read. I do have some new perspective on both Castiglione and Machiavelli.

Machiavelli's tale is a struggle of gaining notoriety and power; he wishes the best for his country and believes he has the knowledge to do it. At the end of the Castiglione and Machiavelli chapter the author describes Machiavelli attempt to get his works to the Medici "...he smuggled them to Rome, offering, like pollen on the wind, to fertilize the destiny of the Medici."

Castiglione is the Courtier; he embodies many of the virtues of the courtier described in The Courtier. His life revolves around the passion of the court. Indeed when Urbino falls he finds himself lost and struggles to find himself "...Urbino, which had once been so essential a part of his being, had now completely disintegrated. Some of its members were dead, others changed, all were scattered, and each carried away a fragment of himself. Suddenly he found himself stranded-a middle-aged sentimentalist evicted from a dream." Never the less Castiglione continued to move forward building an interesting life story and finally he wrote his book of the courtier imparting his knowledge, passion and love of his friends to the rest of the world.

Would I read this book again? Unlikely, I can see why it is available so cheaply unless you truly enjoy the history to overlook the confusing non linear writing style I think most people will give up before finishing it (indeed my book a first edition printed in 1933 has never before been read.) This is a shame because the history is truly interesting.