Chapter 15

Modern History in Nannini's and Belleforest's Anthologies

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Both Remigio Nannini’s Orationi militari (1557) and François de Belleforest’s Harengues militaires (1573) are anthologies of military speeches taken from Greek, Latin, and modern historiographical works.1 The speeches originating from the modern texts deal with issues that were current for the mid-sixteenth century reader, even when they were about historical events that had happened many centuries before. The histories of Florence by Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, and Niccolò Machiavelli, as well as the more recent texts by Galeazzo Capella, Benedetto Accolti, and Paolo Giovio, concern Italy’s political instability, the roles of Popes and Emperors in political negotiations in Italy and Europe, the interest of the French and Spanish monarchies in controlling the Italian peninsula, and the determination of various Popes to carry out a crusade against the Turks. A French or Italian reader of the sixteenth century could pick a side for each of these topics; he could do the same for the Peloponnesian War or the Punic Wars, without a doubt, but the implications would be different. It is, therefore, fair to question Nannini’s and Belleforest's attitudes toward these orations taken from modern historiographical works. They both certainly felt an affinity for particular dynasties and political or religious positions, and this empathy would influence to a certain degree the selection of the speeches, the presentation of the content or the general orientation of the anthology as determined in the prologues or dedications of their anthology.

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1 Saxo Grammaticus (ca. 1150–1220) is the only medieval author that Nannini included in his anthology, an author whose Latin had a certain prestige among the humanists (Erasmus cites him with admiration in his Ciceronianus); see Davidson (1980) 3. The jump from the Byzantine historian Procopius de Caesarea (500–565) to the Florentine humanist Leonardo Bruni (1369–1444) can be explained in part by the Italian translations available to Nannini to prepare his anthology, but it is also clear that this selection reflects a common humanist prejudice toward the medieval world. For more information regarding Nannini’s sources, see Hester (2003) 255–258. Belleforest, less restrictive in this sense, includes the five speeches from Saxo Grammaticus that Nannini chose, but also adds nine more from the Saxon chronicler Widukind de Corvey’s Rerum gestarum Saxonicarum libri tres (ca. 925–ca. 980), cited as Witichinde, and two from the anonymous Vita Heinrici IV imperatoris (ca. 1106–1107).
respective works. The objectives of this chapter are to establish whether their voices are present in the speeches on modern history in their anthologies and, if so, to evaluate the significance of these observations.

1 Nannini’s Orationi Militari

Remigio Nannini quickly demonstrated an interest in disseminating historical works. In 1550 translations of Cornelius Nepos’ biographies (*Degli uomini illustri di Grecia*) and Ammianus Marcellinus’ text (*Delle guerre de Romani*) were published by the well-known Venetian printer Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari. His collaboration with this printer, who was also interested in historiography, became even closer when the Dominican Nannini was transferred from Ancona to the convent of Santi Giovanni e Paolo in Venice in 1556.2 Giolito’s printing press published the first and second editions of the *Orationi militari* (1557 and 1560, with addendums) and another anthology of speeches on civil questions (*Orationi in materia civile e criminale*, 1561), in addition to a reprint of Francesco Guicciardini’s *La Historia d’Italia* (1567).3

Nannini took the modern speeches for his *Orationi militari* from Italian historians, and for this reason a large number of the speeches he included in his anthology deal primarily with military conflicts in Italian territory. The majority of these Italian chroniclers wrote on commission and had political messages to transmit in their texts, and these points of view were reflected in the speeches included in Nannini’s anthology. The Florentine Leonardo Bruni has a negative view of the political power enjoyed by the Popes and the foreign policy of the Visconti family.4 Paolo Giovio is sometimes sympathetic to Charles V’s imperial policies.5 Galeazzo Capella favors the Sforza family over the Viscontis.6 All of these points of view appear in the speeches; Nannini, however, does not include them for their political thoughts, but rather for their military subjects. For example, both the French monarchs and the French Popes are sometimes represented in a negative light, although if Nannini had had a particular interest in reinforcing this perception of the French monarchy, he would not have included the Italian translation (1547) of Paolo Emilio’s

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2 For more about Nannini’s relationship with Giolito, see Peraita’s contribution to this volume.
3 For more about Nannini’s life and works, see Tomei (2012).
6 See the author’s “Prefatione” addressed to “Francesco Sforza, illustissimo secondo Duca di Milano.”