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Riccoboni, Antonio

Born: 1541, Rovigo

Died: 27 July 1599, Padua

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Abstract

Antonio Riccoboni, who taught rhetoric at the University of Padua, was a humanist, historiographer (*Commentarius de historia liber*, 1568; *De gymnasio patavino*, 1598), and the author of translations and commentaries concerning Aristotle's *Ethics*, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*; as regards this latter work in particular, he offered an original interpretation focusing on the importance of the *fabula*. He was also involved in philological debates (on the attribution of a *Consolatio* to Cicero and on the interpretation of Horace's *Ars Poetica*), wherein he was notable for his philological training and astute critical judgement.

Alternate Name

Riccobono, Antonio

Biography

Antonio Riccoboni, having studied initially at Rovigo, moved on to Venice and then to Padua, where he was a pupil of Paolo Manuzio, Marcantonio Mureto, and Carlo Sigonio; he was a member of the *Accademia degli Addormentati* (abolished in 1562) and of the *Accademia degli Animosi*, founded by the abbot, Ascanio Martinengo, whose members included, among others, Sperone Speroni, Bernardino Tomitano, and Francesco Piccolomini. In February 1571, he obtained a doctorate in civil law from Padua University, followed by another one in canon law and, in the same year, he became a professor, a position he held until his death. He also worked with distinction as a public orator, evidence of which is found in two books containing 34 of his orations, published in Padua in 1591 and 1592; these include the three speeches Riccoboni made on the occasion of his academic induction and which focus on the liberal arts, *studia humanitatis* and rhetoric. In 1581, he was granted honorary citizenship of Padua and in 1583 the University employed him to draw up its Statutes. Only a small number of his letters remain, notable among which is a letter to Galileo Galilei (11th March of 1588).

Heritage and Rupture with the Tradition: Innovative and Original Aspects – Impact and Legacy

Riccoboni was noted for his deep interest in historiography. In 1568, he wrote *De historia commentarius*, in which he examined the purpose of history and its relationship with grammar, rhetoric, and poetics, while also devoting attention to the study of sources (the work also contains a selection, with commentary, of fragments from Latin historians). In 1570, he was appointed to revise – together with Andrea Nicolio – the statutes of Rovigo, a job that took 20 years to come to fruition. But in this area, the work that brought him most renown (and which was also his last) is *De Gymnasio Patavino* (1598), the first study of the history of Padua University, the structure of which – focusing on affairs relating to the *doctores clariores* – influenced most of the work of his successors.

Riccoboni should, however, be especially remembered for the intensity of his work on interpreting the writings of Aristotle, concerning which he produced translations as well as commentaries: in particular he translated the first book of *Nicomachean Ethics* (1577) and also the first book of *Rhetoric* (in the same year), the first complete translation of which he published in 1579, accompanied by a rich commentary and, as an appendix, by the translation of Aristotle's *Poetics*, regarding which he also, in 1584, published a notable commentary; his commentary on the whole *Ethics* appeared in 1596 (Lines 2002, p. 517). Despite its debt to Lodovico Castelvetro's interpretation, the main novelty of this work lies in its original redefinition of the role of poetry, identified in the *fabula* as able to generate pleasure and, therefore, useful (Toffanin 1920, p. 136 ff.). Thereby Riccoboni released poetry from a position dependent on utilitarian interpretation, without however leading it towards pure hedonism.

He was also involved in two significant controversies, which throw light both on his philological acuity and on his capacity for independent judgment. The first, involving Carlo Sigonio, revolved around the attribution of a *Consolatio* to Cicero, advocated by Sigonio in an edition devoid of editor's notes or comments, published in 1583 (modern scholarship endorses Riccoboni's rejection of Cicero's authorship, believing the work to be a forgery by Sigonio – see McCuaig 1989, V, pp. 307–326; Forsyth et al. 1999, pp. 1–26). The second controversy involves the Bergamasque priest Nicolò Cologno, who in 1587 had published a pamphlet, *Q. Horatii Flacci methodus de arte poetica*. Cologno had affirmed that Horace's *Ars poetica* had a coherent internal structure, which in his opinion reflected the Aristotelian genre system (epic, tragedy, comedy, and the satyr play). Riccoboni took a contrary stance in his *dissensio de epistola Horatii ad Pisones* (1591). Unlike the earlier case, in this debate the reasons for scientific dissent here seem to be entangled with personal ambition: in 1591 Cologno won a professorship of moral philosophy at the Padua *Stadium*, previously held by Giason Denores, to which Riccoboni also aspired (Frischer 1996).

Cross-References

▶ Castelvetro, Lodovico
▶ Sigonio, Carlo
▶ Speroni, Sperone
▶ Tomitano, Bernardino

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