

**Thomas Deswarte, Bruno Dumézil, Laurent Vissière (ed.), *Lettres et conflits. Antiquité tardive et Moyen Âge*, Madrid (Casa de Velázquez) 2021, XIV–390 p., 5 tabl. (Collection de la Casa de Velázquez, 187 ; Epistola, 3), ISBN 978-84-9096-337-1, EUR 25,00.**

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The volume under consideration is the third produced by the international working group »Epistola«, the goal of which is to focus more attention on the various literary genres that can be grouped under the general rubric of epistolary correspondence. The first volume in this series treated epistolary texts as they were deployed in late antiquity and the early Middle Ages up through the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The second volume focused on diplomatic correspondence in the medieval Latin West. This volume serves as a counter-point to the second by focusing on the use of letters in conflicts, both in late antiquity and throughout the medieval millennium. The studies in this volume address topics over the course of more than a millennium from the Late Roman period through the late Middle Ages. The geographical scope is equally broad, with individual essays examining the late Roman East and Italy, Visigothic Spain, the Carolingian Empire, Anglo-Norman England, France, Castile and Aragon, as well as the eastern lands ruled by the German Order (Teutonic Knights).

Two of the editors of the volume, Thomas Deswarte and Bruno Dumézil, offer a tour of the horizon of epistolary studies in a short but densely constructed introduction, that serves two main goals. The first of these is to justify the overarching project of the »Epistola« working group to draw specific attention to letters as sources for historical inquiry, as well as the specific focus of this volume on the uses of letters in »conflicts« of various types. The second related purpose is to survey the broad set of themes that the editors identify as uniting the otherwise disparate studies collected here. In this context, while emphasizing the Ciceronian trope, which retained its rhetorical force in Christian late antiquity, that the purpose of a letter was to maintain friendship between individuals separated in space, the editors observe that letters also served important functions in announcing, conducting, and ultimately resolving conflicts. These conflicts, as addressed in the seventeen studies collected in this volume ranged very broadly, and included theological disputes, contested claims to honor and prestige, and the territorial claims of kings and emperors.

The volume is organized in three major parts, each of which is further subdivided into sections that each contain 1 to 3 individual articles. Part One, »The Letter and the Progress of War« has three subsections that consider, in turn, »The Unleashing of War«, »Managing Conflicts«, and »Writing for Peace«. In the first essay,



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Valérie Toureille examines letters of defiance issued by high-ranking military leaders in the context of frontier conflicts in Lorraine during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Luciano Piffanelli discusses the institutionalization of letter writing by Florentine officials during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, particularly with respect to diplomatic correspondence. Sebastian Kubon provides an overview of the diplomatic correspondence of the grand masters of the Teutonic Knights in the years around the turn of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Amélie Rigollet analyzes the letters sent by the Welsh prince Llywelyn mab Iorwerth in 1230 to Eve, the widow of William V de Briauze, whom Llywelyn had executed, as well as to Eve's brother William Marshal II. Finally, Néstor Vigil Montes discusses the diplomatic correspondence between the Portuguese and Castilians in the three decades following the battle of Aljubarrota (1385).

The most impressive contribution in part one is the article by Laurent Vissière, the third editor of the volume, who analyzes an exchange of letters between Louis I, the duke of Orléans (1372–1407), and King Henry IV of England (1399–1413) in 1402. In the context of organizing tournaments between French and English participants during a lengthy truce in the Hundred Years' War, the duke sent a letter to King Henry accusing him of having murdered his rightful ruler King Richard II (1367–1399). The English king responded in turn to the duke, expressing his shock at the extraordinary breach of diplomatic etiquette. Vissière analyzes the structure of the series of letters issued by both sides, and provides a valuable survey of the large number of surviving copies of these letters, which were circulated quite broadly and made their way into contemporary narrative accounts as well as being preserved in official government registers. Vissière argues, convincingly, that both the duke and the king sought to use the exchange of letters to shape public opinion, with the public here understood as the members of the French and English elite. However, Vissière concludes on the basis of commentary about the letters in other contemporary sources that both Louis and Henry failed in their efforts, and that the epistolary exchange hurt both of their reputations.

Part two of the volume, titled »Writing War«, also is divided into three sections that consider, in turn, »Diplomatic Correspondence in the Mirror of Literary Works«, »Recounting and Commemorating Conflicts«, and »Justifying War«. In the first of these sections Maxime Emion analyzes Procopius' use of letters, both as literary tools and *pièces justificatives*, in the »The Gothic War«, which he composed in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century. The contribution by Klaus Herbers focuses on three letters sent by Archbishop Eulogius of Toledo from prison in Cordoba in the period before his martyrdom in March 857. Lydwine Scordia examines the epistolary correspondence undertaken by Louis XI (1461–1483) and his military commanders in the context of the French siege of Perpignan in 1463. The final essay in this section, by Juan Manuel Martín García and Rafael Peinado Santaella, examines the role of the kingdom of Granada in the voluminous surviving



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correspondence of the historian and courtier Pedro Martyr de Anglería († 1526).

Particularly compelling in the context of the discussion of »writing war«, is the essay by Lionel Mary, who breaks important new ground in his analysis of the use of letters by Ammianus Marcellinus († c. 400), one of the most important military writers of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, in his »Res Gestae«. Mary seeks to explain why Ammianus chose to include in the »Res Gestae« an epistolary exchange between the Sasanian Shah Shapur II (309–379) and Emperor Constantine II (337–340), which the Roman military officer and historian presents as faithful renditions of the full texts of these documents. Notable in this context is that the correspondence between the two rulers represents two of just four letters that Ammianus included in the eighteen surviving books of his history. Mary provides an extensive and fascinating discussion of Ammianus' style and approach to history writing, his commitment to providing an accurate account of events, and his likely access to the letters sent by Shapur and Constantine. Mary concludes that Ammianus' unusual decision to include this epistolary exchange was determined by his effort to persuade an audience at Rome of the ongoing danger presented by the Persian empire, after the recent death of Shapur II, even in the face of apparently more pressing dangers along the Rhenish and Danubian frontiers.

The third part of the volume is titled »Epistolary Conflicts« and is divided into two parts that consider »Language in the Service of Conflict« and »Letters and the Stakes of Power«. In their analysis of epistolary culture in the high Carolingian period, Florence Close and Christiane Veyrard-Cosme examine the correspondence between Charlemagne's close advisor Alcuin (died 804) and his intellectual opponent Elipandus of Toledo (died 805) about the adoptionist heresy in Spain. Nicholas Drocourt considers the diplomatic correspondence between the Byzantine court and several western leaders, including Emperor Louis II (855–875) and Pope Nicholas I (858–867), during the course of the ninth and tenth centuries. Bruno Lemesle draws on papal letters to examine the efforts of the bishops of Rome to control episcopal elections in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The final essay in this section, by Giulia Cò, focuses on the correspondence of Anastasius, the famed papal librarian (died 878), in the context of the schism between the eastern and western churches over the trinitarian controversy of the 870s involving the Holy Spirit.

The essay in section three that may be of the greatest significance for the readers of »Francia-Recensio« is Nathanaël Nimmegeers' investigation of the efforts by the metropolitans and subsequently the archbishops of Vienne to assert their claims about the boundaries of the archdiocese against the pretensions of the archbishops of Lyon and Arles. Nimmegeers identifies a corpus of more than four hundred letters sent by the archbishops of Vienne between 398 and 1119, in which they asserted their territorial claims, of which 250 were sent to the papal see. Nimmegeers seeks

Mittelalter – Moyen Âge (500–1500)

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to use the conflict over the archdiocesan boundaries of Vienne to illuminate the potential, and often real instability of ecclesiastical boundaries, which scholars have tended to see as much more fixed and permanent than the boundaries of contemporary secular administrative structures.

In a relatively brief conclusion Daniel Baloup reiterates several of the main points made by the editors in the introduction and addresses the question of whether the volume has achieved its goal in illuminating the roles that letters played in military and diplomatic conflicts as well as private quarrels, which reached into the public domain because they touched on matters such as religion, law, and the honor of high-ranking aristocrats. Baloup argues that one of the strengths of the volume is that the editors and contributors avoided what he describes as a sterile debate about the definition of a letter. Baloup concedes in this context, however, that the absence of a definition of a letter leads to consequent difficulties in offering a synthesis or even comparisons of the roles that these documents could serve in conflicts that varied so greatly over time and space.

In sum, this volume succeeds in bringing together many well-crafted essays, which will be of considerable value to specialists in the many fields and periods that are addressed by the contributors. Many of the contributions also serve to highlight the important roles that letters can serve in historical inquiry, whether they survive as independent texts, within registers, or were incorporated into narrative works.



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