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 ***Architettura e committenza nella Napoli del Quattrocento***
(review)

Yoni Ascher

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

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Bianca de Divitiis. *Architettura e committenza nella Napoli del Quattrocento*. Venice:

This is a typical dissertation-based book, characterized by a thorough study and painstaking treatment of every detail at issue. Its protagonist is Diomedes Carafa, who was a central figure at the Neapolitan Aragonese court and a pioneer of Renaissance culture in Southern Italy. The singular personality of this courtier, who has never been considered one of the literate humanist-noblemen who flourished in fifteenth-century Italy, deserves special attention. Though he was not an educated humanist, he did not refrain from writing. Indeed, studies done so far about him deal mainly with the social views expressed in his writings, especially in the eight *Memoriali*.

Architettura e committenza nella Napoli del Quattrocento looks beyond this image to explore the scope and historical significance of Diomedes Carafa's activities as the most important patron of Renaissance art in the southern kingdom, alongside the kings. Concentrating on the sources of his patronage and its goals, de Divitiis makes a significant contribution to the unjustifiably scant study of the artistic expression of Neapolitan humanism.

The author scrutinizes three main issues concerned with Diomedes Carafa's patronage: the building of his palace, his policy of collecting antique sculptures, and the planning of his sepulchral monument. A meticulous discussion of each topic results in new understandings of the Neapolitan Renaissance surpassing the personal case of Diomedes Carafa. It portrays the distinct approach to art in fifteenth-century Naples, a subject that has been rather neglected by scholars till now.

The careful analysis of Diomedes Carafa's palace sheds new light on the architecture of private palaces in Renaissance Naples and its possible sources, reversing along the way some of the familiar concepts established by Roberto Pane almost half a century ago. Together with Beyer's *Parthenope* of 2000, it reopens the discussion of fifteenth-century architecture in Naples and its relation to Northern Italy.

A vigorous reconstruction of the collection of ancient sculptures that Diomede Carafa displayed in the palace and its garden explores the possible origins of the marbles, portraying thereby a Renaissance patron who had pioneering ideas about collecting antiquities. Again, it makes one reconsider certain beliefs about the place of Naples in the story of Renaissance culture in general, and the history of art collecting in particular. It is strange that de Divitiis did not regard this important contribution worthy of a separate discussion, but included it, together with the study of the palace architecture, in one long chapter.

The third topic discussed in the book is Diomede Carafa's policy of sepulchral commemoration. The thorough analysis of his decisions on the placement and the form of his tomb illumines the sources and meanings of one of the most popular types of sepulchral monuments for the higher bourgeoisie in fifteenth-century [End Page 167] Naples. For those concerned with that issue the conclusions of this chapter, like those of the preceding, are groundbreaking.

A short epilogue is dedicated to the Succorpo, the grand sepulchral chapel that Cardinal Oliviero Carafa, Diomede's nephew, erected under the main chapel of the cathedral of Naples. The author connects the sepulchral projects of the two prominent fifteenth-century figures of the Carafa della Stadera to demonstrate a line of innovative patronage in this family, but this connection is flimsy. The epilogue conforms to the book's title, and even more to that of the dissertation on which it is based, but it does not contribute much to the main chapters, which deal with Diomede Carafa alone.

The titles of all three chapters of the book relate to the *seggio* system of quarter division that characterized Renaissance Naples. These titles are misleading, implying a social study, whereas the content focuses on Diomede Carafa's patronage. The first chapter contains short surveys of the story of the Carafa family and of the *seggi* system, while the third chapter centers on Diomede Carafa's sepulchral projects. It is left thus to the middle chapter, *Abbitare in Seggio: il palazzo di Diomede Carafa*, to include...

Bianca de Divitiis. *Architettura e committenza nella Napoli del Quattrocento*.

Venice: Marsilio Editori S. P. A., 2007. 220 pp. append. illus. tbk. map. €23. ISBN: 978-88-317-9108-3.

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