

*Invisibile come Dio: La vita e l'opera di Gabriele Biondo.* By Michele Lodone. [Studi, 42] (Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2020. Pp. 367. € 28.00. ISBN 978-88-7642-671-1.)

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This is the first comprehensive study of the life and thought of the enigmatic figure of Gabriele Biondo (ca. 1445–1511), the youngest of the famous humanist Flavio Biondo's five sons. It is enriched with a detailed survey of his surviving manuscripts and a transcription / critical edition of his three most important treatises: the *De meditatione et deceptionibus* (1492); fragments from the *Ricordo* (1498) and its complete Latin translation the *Commentarius* (1503); and the *De amore proprio* (1502–06). This monograph is an expansion of Lodone's 2012 thesis on the latter treatise at the Scuola Normale Pisa under Franco Bacchelli who encouraged him to expand on earlier studies of Gabriele conducted by Augusto Campana (on Gabriele's humanism and his roots in the Romagna), Carlo Dionisotti (on his poetry and letters), and Delio Cantimori (on the religious context in which he worked). This volume admirably succeeds in this task. The scholarship is based on extensive archival research, careful reconstructions using documentary evidence, cautious judgments, and an empathy for his subject.

Information on Gabriele's early life is limited. He apparently grew up in Rome where his father Flavio (1392–1463) held the posts of apostolic secretary and notary of the Camera. He was trained in the humanities. By 1468 he was a noted Roman poet, had apparently acquired a doctoral degree in both laws, and was made a count of the Lateran Palace. Unlike his brothers, Gabriele did not pursue a career in the Roman Curia, although he is listed in 1470 as an apostolic notary. Lodone suspects that in the late 1460s, Gabriele underwent a conversion experience influenced by the writings of Pietro di Giovanni Olivi and Angelo Clareno. His father was a supporter of the Observant movement in the Franciscan Order and his sister Eugenia joined the Clarissa convent of Corpus Christi in Ferrara. While espousing the Franciscan emphasis on poverty, Gabriele was very critical of the friars who claimed to practice it. He never joined the Franciscans, but instead became a secular priest. When and where is not clear.

Also a mystery is how and why he assumed by 1470 the post of prior of the pieve of San Stefano in Modigliana—was it a collegiate church whose prior was elected, did someone with patronage rights over it nominate him, did Bishop Bartolomeo Gandolfi of Faenza appoint him, or did the Roman curia intervene? Gabriele had an maternal uncle, Manfredo Maldenti, living in the area. Did he leave Rome where he saw false prophets and the antiChrist and flee to this mountainous area based on the exhortation of Matt 24: 16? Once there he gathered around himself a group of disciples, a kind of confraternity (the *Friends of Truth*), whose members lived there, in Florence, and elsewhere, reaching to Bologna and Venice.

The spirituality he dispensed called for the annihilation of self, direct contact with God, a downplaying of the role a priest as mediator and of the rituals and sacraments as vehicles of grace. He propagated these views in his letters and treatises. His *De meditatione et deceptionibus* aimed at teaching beginners how to pray: realize one's unworthiness and complete dependence on divine grace, gaze affectionately on Christ crucified, resign one's self to God's will, abandon all forms of self-love, and receive the gift of divine light. The treatise *De amore proprio* was in the form of a letter to Sister Alessandra degli Ariosti of the Clarissa Corpus

Christi convent in Bologna. It warned against self love that seeks earthly things, instead abandon oneself to God's will, be passive, and let God infuse His grace and act in us. The *Ricordo*, a collection of his teachings with a final section denouncing Savonarola as a false prophet, became the target of an Venetian inquisitorial process in Padua in 1501-02, with the imprisonment of his disciple Giovanni Maria Capucci, a defense of hm by Antonio Trombetta, OFM, an absolution by Cardinal Bernardino López de Carvajal, and an order of release from Julius II. Gabriele's ideas were considered brash, but not heretical.

Lodone provides a critical edition of these three treatises based principally on manuscripts in Florence (*Ricordo*) and in London (*De meditatione et deceptionibus*, *Ricordo*, and *De amore proprio*). Gabiele's forty-four surviving letters are scattered in archives stretching from Seville to Forlì and will be the subject of a promised subsequent critical edition.

As a result of his reseach the enigmatic figure of Gabriele Biondo is less obscure and one can understand why he gathered around himself a group of disciple seeking a deeper experience of God, while remaining within the institutional Church. For this impressive service to scholarship, we are all indebted to Michele Lodone.

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