

Foreword

By Margaret L. King

From its composition in 1529/1530¹ until the twentieth century, Pompeo Colonna's *Apologia mulierum*, translated in this volume as *In Defense of Women*,² had only a handful of readers. Prior to its successive Latin editions in 1909, 1972, and 2015,³ the *Apologia* existed only in three sixteenth-century manuscript

1. According to Franco Minonzio (see Introduction, 19–23), the *Apologia* was completed before Colonna's appointment as archbishop of Monreale on December 14 (or possibly August 3), 1530, but after the publication of Castiglione's *Libro del cortegiano* in 1528 and the composition in 1528–1529 of Paolo Giovio's *Dialogus de viris et foeminis aetate nostra florentibus*. Baldassare [Baldezar, Baldassar] Castiglione's *Libro del cortegiano*, which comprised four books, was published in 1528 in Venice by the Aldine Press and in Florence by the heirs of Filippo di Giunta. Recent editions of *Il libro del cortegiano* are by Amedeo Quondam and Nicola Longo (Milan: Garzanti, 1981), and by Giulio Carnazzi, with an introduction by Salvatore Battaglia (Milan: Rizzoli, 1987). The classic and widely-reprinted English translation of *The Book of the Courtier* by Charles S. Singleton is cited here, as it appears in the respected Norton Critical Edition by Daniel Javitch (New York: Norton, 2002). For the multiple editions and translations of the *Courtier* and its cultural impact, see Peter Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier: The European Reception of Castiglione's Cortegiano* (London: Polity Press, 1995). Henceforth, references to the Italian version will be given as *Cortegiano*, and to the English as *Courtier*; references to the third of the four books, which contains a discussion of women's capacities, will be cited as *Cortegiano* III. Giovio's *Dialogus*, which remained unpublished into the twentieth century, is now available in Franco Minonzio's bilingual edition (Latin and Italian): *Dialogo sugli uomini e le donne illustri del nostro tempo / Dialogus de viris et foeminis aetate nostra florentibus*, 2 vols. (Turin: Nino Aragno, 2011), cited henceforth as Giovio, *Dialogus*; references to its third book, which surveys prominent female figures, will be cited as *Dialogus* III. The English translation and edition by Kenneth Gouwens, *Notable Men and Women of Our Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), reprints Minonzio's Latin text with a newly annotated English translation.

2. Both the Latin text of the *Apologia mulierum* and its Italian translation, entitled *Difesa delle donne*, appear in *In difesa delle donne / Apologia mulierum*, edited and translated by Franco Minonzio ([Lecce]: Polyhistor Edizioni; [Como]: New Press Edizioni, 2015). The Latin text, which is reprinted in this volume at 89–117, will be cited henceforth as *Apologia*; Minonzio's Italian version as *Difesa*; and the English version by Margaret L. King included in this volume, entitled *In Defense of Women*, as *Defense*. Minonzio's Introduzione to his volume is translated here in abridged form from the Italian original; citations are to the Introduction, for the English version, or to Minonzio, Introduzione, for the Italian.

3. The earliest edition of the Latin text appears in the appendix of the second edition of Aida Consorti's monograph (the first edition having been published in 1902): *Il cardinale Pompeo Colonna: Su documenti editi e inediti* (Rome: Stab. Tip. lit. S. Consorti, 1909), Documento XX, at 224–71. The second Latin edition is by Guglielmo Zappacosta in *Studi e ricerche sull'umanesimo italiano: Testi inediti del XV e XVI secolo* (Bergamo-Messina: Minerva Italica, 1972), with introduction at 159–97, text at

versions that likely did not enjoy wide circulation.⁴ Its obscurity, however, belies its intellectual significance. It is, in fact, a notable contribution to the sequence of pro-woman works which (along with their rebuttals) are often called, collectively, the *querelle des femmes* (the debate about women)—a conspicuous strand of the intellectual product of the period 1350 to 1750, corresponding to the Renaissance and early modern era. Within that tradition, Colonna's text belongs more precisely to a subcategory that will be explored in this volume's Postscript:⁵ that of male-authored works—of which dozens, if not hundreds, were written—defending or praising women's moral capacity, intellectual strength, and historical achievement. Male voices, the dominant voice, paved the way for the emergence of the "other voice," the voices of women calling for an end to their long subordination.

Colonna's *Apologia* deserves attention for several reasons. First, its author, amid a coterie of warriors, courtiers, princes, high-ranking ecclesiasts, poets, humanists, and writers, belongs to the highest stratum of Renaissance figures who stood at the center of culture and power. Second, the *Apologia* is one of a pivotal set of densely interrelated early-sixteenth-century pro-woman texts—conspicuous among them Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528), one of the key products of Renaissance intellectual discourse in any language. Third, while Colonna repeats many of the tropes and parables common to the male-authored pro-woman genre, he also interjects some startling and unique arguments supporting the claim of the parity of male and female. Building on Franco Minonzio's meticulous study of the *Apologia* in his introduction to the Latin edition and Italian translation, this Foreword will examine these three points.

Pompeo and Vittoria

The story of Colonna's *Apologia* opens up a High Renaissance tableau of warring armies, shifting alliances, intricate scheming, ecclesiastical misbehavior, amorous intrigues, intellectual debates, literary networks, and humanist commentary, among other features of an era that saw a pope driven into hiding and a French king taken into captivity. Pompeo Colonna (1479–1532) was a pivotal figure in all these endeavors.⁶ Born into one of the two major noble families who had for centuries dominated the politics and culture of the city of Rome, meddling at will in the operations of the papacy, the young Pompeo first shone as a *condottiere*,

199–246. The third, by Minonzio (2015), appears at 139–65 in his edition *In difesa delle donne / Apologia mulierum* (reprinted here at 89–117), with annotations (to the Italian version) at 112–38.

4. The three manuscript versions are C: Rome, Archivio Colonna, ms. II.A 27, n. 44; V: Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. *Vat. Lat.* 5892, fols. 2r–36v; and A: Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, ms. Q 123, sup. 16.

5. See the Postscript at 129–49.

6. For Pompeo Colonna, see Introduction, 1n3.

a mercenary captain, following in the footsteps of his uncle Prospero Colonna. Still young and unmarried (a wife would have barred access to an ecclesiastical career), Pompeo was chosen by family elders to serve the interests of the clan by becoming a clergyman, poised to replace an aging kinsman as a cardinal in the Sacred College, an advancement he achieved in 1517. Such a conversion from secular to ecclesiastical life was not unusual but nearly commonplace in the Renaissance, when, amid a matchless cultural florescence, moral constraints were rarely permitted to hinder the raw pursuit of power.

Having experienced the pontificates of Julius II (1503–1513), Leo X (1513–1521), and Adrian VI (1522–1523), and hoping that he himself might be elected to the papacy, Pompeo instead became, on the election of cardinal Giulio de' Medici as Pope Clement VII (r. 1523–1534), the pope's implacable rival. Just as Pompeo Colonna had little vocation as a cardinal, Clement VII, the scion of the Medici rulers of Florence, had little as pope. He ruled the Holy See not so much as head of the church (then crucially challenged by the Protestant Reformation underway in the German lands) as one of the several princes who struggled for hegemony in Italy.

Alliances shifted constantly, as after each military event the players reshuffled themselves to oppose that one of the others who had seized the upper hand, but from the time of Clement's elevation in 1523 to Pompeo's death in 1532, the two men remained at odds. Colonna supported Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and his Spanish kinsmen, who would in due course establish dominion over Naples in the south of Italy and Milan in the north.

Pompeo had become a cardinal, but did not cease to be a soldier—sporting both “helmet in the camp and surplice at the altar,” as his biographer, Paolo Giovio, noted tellingly.⁷ A commander of the victorious forces of Emperor Charles V in the battle of Pavia in 1525, which resulted in the capture of French king Francis I and the annihilation of that monarch's Italian prospects, Pompeo led an insurrection against Clement in 1526 in response to the pope's enlistment in the anti-imperial League of Cognac. In 1527, however, when unpaid and voracious imperial troops seized the Vatican during the infamous Sack of Rome, with Clement barely escaping to his refuge in nearby Castel Sant'Angelo, Pompeo interceded to settle terms and secure the pope's release⁸—signaling not the end of Pompeo's enmity but his recognition that the game had gone too far. Later chosen by the emperor to replace the Spanish viceroy in Naples, Pompeo was soon replaced in turn, and in 1530, he retired—perhaps unhappily—in seclusion.

7. As quoted by T. C. Price Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio: The Historian and the Crisis of Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 244.

8. For Pompeo's intervention, see Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio*, 84–85.

In that forced retirement, in middle age, Pompeo occupied himself with the intellectual and artistic pursuits for which he had been educated, and which he had never wholly neglected during his years of clerical administration, political maneuvering, and military adventure. For this was an era not only of conflict and intrigue, but also of intense literary and artistic activity—an activity powered by hundreds of academies, courts, and private salons hosting a shared Platonic, Neoplatonic, Aristotelian, Ciceronian, Christian, and humanist culture, and pursued by an intellectual elite active in Venice, Florence, Milan, Rome, Naples, and numerous smaller courts and cities. Pompeo Colonna thus emerges as a puzzling hybrid: a ruthless soldier and adroit politician, and at the same time an elegant connoisseur, patron, and author. He embodies an ambiguity that Minonzio describes deftly in his *Introduzione* to the *Apologia mulierum*. Minonzio further highlights the important role played in this story by Pompeo’s cousin, Vittoria Colonna.

The noblewoman Vittoria, born like Pompeo to the Roman Colonna clan, was married in 1509, then age nineteen, to twenty-year-old Francesco Ferdinando (Ferrante) I d’Avalos, a nobleman and condottiere in the service of the Spanish kingdom of Naples.⁹ They had married by arrangement, but, if Vittoria’s portrayal of their relationship in her strikingly personal sonnets is to be credited, they were deeply in love—while remaining childless. Upon d’Avalos’s premature death in 1525, Vittoria acquired her marital dowry (there being no children) and managed the estates inherited from her parents, an unusual situation that allowed her to demonstrate her administrative and financial skills.

It is, however, as a poet, not an administrator, that Vittoria is best known. Indeed, her poetry elevates her above nearly all other women of the Italian Renaissance—to the extent that Ramie Targoff entitled her recent biography of Vittoria Colonna simply “Renaissance Woman,” as though there were no other deserving of the name.¹⁰ Vittoria’s “poems of widowhood,” a sonnet sequence expressing her enduring love for her dead husband, were gathered in the 1538 volume of her works that not only constituted her first appearance in print, but the first solo publication of lyric poetry by any woman during the Italian Renaissance.¹¹

In addition to writing to and about d’Avalos, Vittoria Colonna engaged in literary conversation with some of the most important men of the era, among

9. For Vittoria Colonna, see Introduction, 8n23.

10. Ramie Targoff, *Renaissance Woman: The Life of Vittoria Colonna* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

11. Now published with English translation in Vittoria Colonna, *Poems of Widowhood: A Bilingual Edition of the 1538 Rime*, ed. Ramie Targoff and Troy Tower, trans. Ramie Targoff (New York and Toronto: Iter Press, 2021).

them the artist Michelangelo, for whom she wrote another set of sonnets;¹² the diplomat Baldassare Castiglione, author of the *Courtier*; and the cardinal and scholar Pietro Bembo, the prime architect, after Dante, of the Italian vernacular.¹³ At the same time—like her correspondent Marguerite de Navarre,¹⁴ sister of French king Francis I and, by marriage to Henry II d'Albret, king of Navarre, queen of that small state—Vittoria was deeply devout, and in a profound and original way. She drew close to the Franciscan preacher Bernardino Ochino, who would flee to Switzerland in 1542 to avoid prosecution for heresy, and she joined the heterodox circle of Spanish reformer Juan de Valdés, along with her cousin Giulia Gonzaga—whose involvement with the *spirituale* movement would likely have led to her condemnation as a heretic had she not fortuitously died first.¹⁵ Vittoria's religious convictions, like her experience of married love, inform her poetry, as seen in her spiritual sonnets.¹⁶

In retrospect, Vittoria Colonna outshines her cousin Pompeo as a poet and reformer, although his prominence at the time was unquestionable. The two knew each other well. Pompeo includes in the *Apologia* glimpses of Vittoria's life, specifically noting her reaction to the sly attempt by papal agents to suborn her husband, as well as her tolerance for his flagrant adultery. More directly, Pompeo not only names Vittoria as the dedicatee of his work (and, from the outset, its patroness, or muse), but also indicates that it was she who prompted him to undertake it (1.1–3). Together, as he writes, they are engaged in the monumental task of defending all women, who otherwise would be vulnerable to the derogations of their critics. Pompeo will respond to each in turn, “so as not to leave your sex . . . undefended and dishonored” (1.8).¹⁷

12. See Vittoria Colonna, *Sonnets for Michelangelo: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. Abigail Brundin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

13. For Vittoria's relations with Bembo, see also Introduction, 21–22n72.

14. For Vittoria's relations with Marguerite, see Targoff, *Renaissance Woman*, 143–47, and Introduction, 25n85.

15. For Vittoria's involvement with Ochino and Valdés, see Targoff, *Renaissance Woman*, 112–19. On Valdés and his circle, see also Daniel Crews, “Juan de Valdés,” in *Oxford Bibliographies: Renaissance and Reformation*, <<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0347.xml>>; on the background of the Italian reform movement, see Diego Pirillo, “The Italian Reformation,” in *Oxford Bibliographies: Renaissance and Reformation*, <<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0285.xml>>.

16. See especially Abigail Brundin, *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation* (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), as well as Targoff, *Renaissance Woman*, 147–54.

17. Throughout the *Apologia*, as commonly in other *querelle* texts, reference is made to the “female sex,” seen as an absolute and essential biologically-based identity, with both physiological and psychological dimensions, as established by both philosophical and biblical authority. The concept did not yet

Introduction:
Pompeo Colonna in Defense of Women

By Franco Minonzio; translated by Margaret L. King

Preamble

In the first third of the sixteenth century, a period in Italy of refined cruelty, insatiable hatreds, and shameless dissimulation, where nothing seemed more perilous, more insidious, than men's secret desires,² the historical existence of Pompeo Colonna seems to be elusive, unsettling, and ambiguous. It displays, in a dizzying riot of shadows, the diverse identities that he wished to and knew how to embody (the soldier, the cardinal, the feudatory, the merchant, the thinker, the patron, the connoisseur), and suggests how much these identities tended in fact to interpenetrate, each one melting into the next.³

Yet to his contemporaries a unique set of traits distinguished him: the toughness of a soldier, the haughty insolence of a Roman nobleman, the fierce disdain of a faction chief. It was only in juxtaposition to that public image that Pompeo's essential ambiguity could be discerned by observers of these contradictory and disconcerting effects [. . .]. The result was, and is, that while no single one of these diverse facets of his character could fully define him, they were nonetheless essentially real, while coexisting in tense equilibrium, and in any case all were deeply rooted in his psychological makeup—and were therefore, to a certain degree, all true.

1. Minonzio's *Introduzione*, translated here with some abridgments, appears in his edition and translation of the *Apologia mulierum* at 9–79. Deleted material is indicated by three bracketed ellipses. See “Notes on the Translation of the Introduction and Text” in the Foreword, at xxxiv.

2. nothing . . . secret desires: Alluding to Giovio, *Dialogus*, 2:189. See Foreword at xxvii–xxviii. [Minonzio, *Introduzione*, 9n1]

3. For Pompeo Colonna, see especially Franca Petrucci, “Colonna, Pompeo,” *DBI* 27 (1982), 407–12, <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pompeo-colonna_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/>; and Consorti, *Il cardinale Pompeo Colonna*. For a pertinent episode of Pompeo's political activity, see Alessandro Serio, “Pompeo Colonna tra papato e grandi monarchie, la pax romana del 1511 e i comportamenti politici dei baroni romani,” in *La nobiltà romana in età moderna: Profili istituzionali e pratiche sociali*, ed. Maria Antonietta Visceglia (Rome: Carocci, 2001), 63–87. For the Colonna family within the broader political context, see especially Pio Paschini, *I Colonna* (Rome: Istituto di studi romani, 1955), and Alessandro Serio, *Una gloriosa sconfitta: I Colonna tra papato e impero nella prima età moderna, 1431–1530* (Rome: Viella, 2008). See also the website *The Colonna Family* at Galleria Colonna: <<https://www.galleriacolonna.it/en/the-colonna-family/>>. [Minonzio, *Introduzione*, 9n2]

With regard to the text presented in this volume, Colonna's *Apologia mulierum*,⁴ all that has been said points to one curt, blunt question to which I shall try to supply an answer: can a ruthless warrior, a cardinal without vocation and without compassion, a provocateur of the Sack of Rome⁵—can such a man be at the same time (and unreservedly show himself to be) an ardent defender of women, and of their right to be deemed, for their estimable merits and capacities, the social equals of men? This is perhaps the most extraordinary enigma—shall I say the most incomprehensible?—surrounding his historical personage.

Pompeo Colonna: A Life

Pompeo Colonna was born in Rome on May 12, 1479 to Girolamo, prince of Salerno, and the Roman noblewoman Vittoria Conti. Orphaned at age three of his father (who had been killed in a riot in Rome), he was reared, with his three brothers, at Monte Compatri by his uncle Prospero Colonna.⁶ His precocious participation in the battle of Palombara (April 12, 1498), in which the Colonna defeated the Orsini,⁷ establishing from a position of strength the preconditions for a transitory reconciliation with their historic enemy, may be considered the first step of his rapid rise in a successful military career as well as the public inauguration of an existence played out mostly in the trappings of a warrior and grandee.

4. See the Foreword, xv note 1, for citation of the Latin *Apologia mulierum* and its Italian and English versions. In all its versions, references to specific passages are denoted in Arabic numerals indicating book and section: e.g., 1.19, for Book One, section 19.

5. For Colonna's role in the Sack of Rome, see in this Introduction, 5nn13–14. For the sack itself, see Antonio di Pierro, *Il sacco di Roma, 6 maggio 1527: L'assalto dei lanzichenecchi* (Milan: Mondadori, 2003); Kenneth Gouwens, ed., *Remembering the Renaissance: Humanist Narratives of the Sack of Rome* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); and Judith Hook, *The Sack of Rome, 1527* (London: Macmillan, 1972; 2nd ed., Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). For a bibliographical overview, see Jessica Goethals, "The Sack of Rome (1527)," in *Oxford Bibliographies: Renaissance and Reformation*, <<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0417.xml>>.

6. For Prospero Colonna, and for other major figures named in these pages, see the Glossary of Names.

7. For the aspirations of the two principal Roman noble families, Colonna and Orsini, see especially Andreas Rehberg, "Alessandro VI e i Colonna: Motivazioni e strategia nel conflitto fra il papa Borgia e il baronato romano," in *Roma di fronte all'Europa al tempo di Alessandro VI: Atti del Convegno, Città del Vaticano-Roma, 1–4 dicembre 1999*, ed. Maria Chiabò, Silvia Maddalo, Massimo Miglio, and Anna Maria Oliva (Rome: Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali, direzione generale per gli archivi, 2001), 1:345–86; and Christine Shaw, *The Political Role of the Orsini Family from Sixtus IV to Clement VII: Barons and Factions in the Papal State* (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 2007), 97–123. For the militarism of popes, cardinals, and noble feudatories and more broadly, see also David S. Chambers, *Popes, Cardinals, and War: The Military Church in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: I. B. Taurus, 2006), especially 144–52 for the reign of Clement VII. [Minonzio, Introduzione, 11n3]

Among his numerous adventures worthy of note, Pompeo's youthful enlistment, alongside Prospero, in the service of Federico of Aragon takes first place, followed by, after Federico's departure for France, Pompeo's transfer to the service of Spain, always with his uncle, under the flag of Consalvo di Cordova [Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba]. He took part in feats of arms in Apulia [. . .] and, at Prospero's side as always, in the battle of Cerignola (April 28, 1503) [. . .]. Given the implacable hatred harbored by Pope Alexander VI toward Pompeo's family, resulting in a bull of excommunication and the confiscation of property (December 20, 1501), the election to the Holy See of Pietro di Giuliano della Rovere as Pope Julius II (November 1, 1503) posed a turn of events heralding favorable outcomes for the Colonna, who envisaged recouping their possessions. To harvest further the fruits of this propitious circumstance, notwithstanding the latest display of valor that Pompeo gave during the battle of Garigliano (December 29, 1503), the idea took hold in the Colonna family of designating Pompeo for an ecclesiastical career.

As Giovanni, the Colonna family representative in the Sacred College, was then in declining health, the family decided to bet on Pompeo (the one possible candidate because of his celibate condition) as his successor—a succession which, it seemed, would not be too long in coming. And so, having assumed the title of apostolic protonotary on Giovanni's death (September 26, 1508), the initially reluctant Pompeo succeeded him as the titular of rich benefices; a few weeks later, on October 6, he was ordained bishop of Rieti.⁸

This allocation of key positions in the church hierarchy by hereditary principle for political advantage was at the time the regular practice of leading families of the Roman and Italian aristocracy.⁹ What is especially shocking in this case is Colonna's utter estrangement from any kind of religious involvement that could legitimate his elevation: as a man-at-arms and the devotee of a life of refinement surrounded by literati and artists, he was an aristocrat in the distinctive mold of the Roman tradition. This was so much the case that, in August 1511, on the day after news had broken of the imminent death of Julius II, Pompeo took the lead of popular uprisings in Rome. But he had not counted on the vitality of the

8. The Colonna family having arranged for Pompeo to take over his deceased kinsman's role in the Sacred College, he ascended first to the rank of apostolic protonotary, a member of the highest grouping of papal officials below the rank of bishop, and later, among other titles yielding ample incomes, that of bishop of the diocese of Rieti, an ancient town in the Lazio region of central Italy some fifty miles northeast of Rome.

9. For the Renaissance cardinalate and its power relations, see especially Sandro Carocci, *Il nepotismo nel Medioevo: Papi, cardinali e famiglie nobili* (Rome: Viella, 1999), and Barbara McClung Hallman, *Italian Cardinals, Reform, and the Church as Property, 1492–1563* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). For comments on the Colonna family activity specifically, see Serio, *Una gloriosa sconfitta*, 104, and Serio, "Pompeo Colonna," 69. [Minonzio, Introduzione, 11n4]

pope, who, having regained his health, punished Pompeo—not immediately, but gravely, depriving him of his bishopric and his benefices, and even after granting the desired pardon, not fully restoring him to his previous status.

During this period, and in the course of the events following upon the death of Julius II (February 21, 1513), the luminaries of the Colonna family urged upon Pompeo a more moderate posture: first his uncle Prospero, then Fabrizio Colonna, persuaded him to put his faith in the new pope Giovanni de' Medici, who reigned as Leo X (1513–1521). That move reaped notable benefits for him, but also for them: thanks to the credit Pompeo enjoyed with Leo X, the pope's meeting at Bologna in the autumn of 1515 with [the French king] Francis I facilitated the liberation of Prospero, who had been taken prisoner by the French.

Named cardinal on July 1, 1517, Pompeo quickly ascended to the leadership of the more intensely pro-imperial faction in the Sacred College. For this reason, on the death of Leo X (December 1, 1521), not many were surprised—well aware that both men aspired to succeed to the papacy—to witness Pompeo's opposition to the cousin of the deceased pontiff, the cardinal Giulio de' Medici, who was at that time also ardently pro-imperial. Their personal antipathy, as well as that between their families, grew even more pronounced after the election to the pontificate (on January 9, 1522) of Adrian VI, with whom Pompeo had prudently maintained good relations. Giulio de' Medici, meanwhile, who had not been able at first to establish a close rapport with Adrian, achieved greater standing with the new pope after the episode of Cardinal Soderini's pro-French conspiracy (March–April 1523),¹⁰ and was considered by Charles V to be the worthiest candidate to succeed Pope Adrian.

Certain incontestable data, among them that of Pompeo's conspicuous ambition, make clear the fundamental conflict [between the two cardinals]. In 1522 and 1523, participating in two conclaves, Pompeo won no votes. Precisely the failure of the strategies deployed in these—especially in the second, when Colonna, pressed by circumstances, had in the end contributed to the election (November 19, 1523) of Giulio de' Medici as Pope Clement VII—was a latent cause of frustration, and a principal factor in the increasing distance between Clement and Pompeo.¹¹ That distance persisted regardless of the fact that, once seated, the new pope had paid to Pompeo his debt of gratitude, bestowing on him profitable grants and offices.

In the years that followed, moreover, the pope's vacillating political positions, and his ever more explicit pro-French leaning, evident earlier but still more after [the battle of] Pavia, propelled Pompeo, in words and gestures, to signal his

10. For the 1523 conspiracy of Francesco Soderini and other cardinals, see K. J. P. Lowe, *Church and Politics in Renaissance Italy: The Life and Career of Cardinal Francesco Soderini, 1453–1524* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

11. For Pompeo's yielding, upon terms, to Clement's election, see Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio*, 61.

opposition.¹² He prowled the Roman countryside—ever more like a soldier and less like a man of the church—recruiting and drilling troops. The ostentatiously antipapal posture he had taken, in its pre-insurrectionary demeanor, earned him, on January 24, 1526, the promulgation of a pontifical bull that declared him a rebel.

After several months of skirmishing and fake accords, on September 20, 1526, at the head of a band of five thousand armed men crying “Empire and Liberty,” and to the utter indifference of the inhabitants, Pompeo entered the Eternal City.¹³ They penetrated as far as St. Peter’s Basilica and the papal palaces in an incursion that was not, nor was it meant to be, a mere demonstration. According to the hypothesis formulated by Guicciardini, the goal was to depose Clement,¹⁴ and perhaps also to go further. The Medici vendetta that followed—inflicted heavily on Colonna possessions, since inflicting it on the person of the cardinal was impossible—could in no way boost Pompeo’s hatred, for it had already, long since, reached its zenith.

So it was that, when a year later, on May 6, 1527, the duke of Bourbon’s Tercios, who had descended on Italy to oppose the League of Cognac, stormed and occupied Rome,¹⁵ it was not difficult to trace the line of continuity to the Sack from the earlier event of Colonna’s raid on the Vatican palaces. That assault could

12. Imperial forces decisively defeated the French at the battle of Pavia (1525), in which the French king Francis I was taken prisoner. The following year, the papacy would ally with France, along with Florence, Venice, and Milan, to drive Emperor Charles V out of Italy. Pompeo Colonna, however, was staunchly pro-imperial.

13. For Colonna’s insurrectionary strike on Rome, see Judith Hook, “Clement VII, the Colonna and Charles V: A Study of the Political Instability of Italy in the Second and Third Decades of the Sixteenth Century,” *European Studies Review* 2 (1972): 281–99; Hook, *The Sack of Rome*, 93–102; and Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio*, 79–80. [Minonzio, *Introduzione*, 14n13]

14. The diplomat and historian Francesco Guicciardini, who as head of the papal forces during April and May 1527 failed to halt the advance of imperial forces on Rome, depicts Pompeo’s aims during the 1526 insurrection: “Also present was the Cardinal Pompeo Colonna, so carried away by ambition and fury that he had conspired to bring about the Pope’s violent death, and (as commonly and firmly believed) to seize with bloody hands and most wicked deeds the vacant pontifical seat, forcing the cardinals to elect him by force of arms.” See Guicciardini, *The History of Italy*, ed. and trans. Sidney Alexander (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), chap. 17, at 372. [Minonzio, *Introduzione*, 14n12]. See also the account of Pompeo’s actions during the sack in Targoff, *Renaissance Woman*, 83–89.

15. Charles III, duke of Bourbon, led the force of 6,000 Tercios, a formidable Spanish military unit, and also, under Georg Frundsberg, 14,000 German (and largely Lutheran) Landesknechts, who together assaulted Rome in May 1527. Upon Charles’s death on May 6, his troops (unpaid, and having been promised booty in lieu of wages) mutinied and enacted the Sack of Rome that lasted until February 1528. The Sack led to the dismantling of the League of Cognac, the alliance of France, the papacy, Venice, Florence, and Milan signed on May 22, 1526 to oppose Emperor Charles V’s advance on Italy. For the Sack of Rome, see in this Introduction, 2n5.

be understood as a kind of dress rehearsal that had demonstrated how easily the city could be penetrated, and how, already desecrated, it was in a sense predisposed to invasion. Only when he saw with his own eyes the extraordinary gravity of the situation that he had helped create did Pompeo mobilize himself to prevent its escalating out of control.¹⁶

After meeting with Clement, Pompeo obtained the liberation of the cardinals who had been taken as hostages and that of the pope himself. Then he left immediately for the Kingdom of Naples, where he raised his own military force to confront the French threat. In 1530 the effects of restored relations with the Medici became apparent, when on December 14 (or perhaps August 3), Clement VII named Pompeo bishop of Monreale.¹⁷ So long as [Philibert of Châlon, prince of] Orange held the position of viceroy in Naples, Pompeo showed himself capable of moderation in the exercise of military command; but once Philibert departed for Florence (in 1530), Pompeo displayed, at first in the rank of lieutenant and later as acting viceroy, irritating traces of the harshness inherent in his character. These were evidenced especially in interactions with the Parliament of the Kingdom, stirring up antagonisms and grievances that came to the ears of Charles V, who was certainly no admirer of the brash rapacity with which Colonna was exploiting his position for his own advantage. This behavior led to Pompeo's removal, and [on September 4,] 1532, to the appointment of Pedro [Álvarez] de Toledo as viceroy.¹⁸ Pompeo, however, escaped the disgrace of his deposition: for he had died in Naples on June 28, 1532—of poison, it was suspected.¹⁹

Here then we have the biography of a man-at-arms, a military leader, a person both hard and, at times, ruthless; of a sensual man (the father of five illegitimate children); one who perceived the office of cardinal, to which he ascended

16. For Pompeo's regrets and change of direction following the Sack of Rome, see Giovio, *Dialogus*, 1:189–91, and Zimmermann, *Paolo Giovio*, 83–85. The Venetian humanist Pietro Alcionio credits Pompeo's actions at this point with the salvation of Rome: see Gouwens, ed., *Remembering the Renaissance*, 31–72, with a transcription at 206–12 of Alcionio's *De urbe servata* from the manuscript Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. Lat. 3436, cc. 41v–45v. [Minonzio, *Introduzione*, 15n14]

17. Monreale: town in Sicily, on the outskirts of Palermo.

18. Álvarez was made viceroy on September 4, 1532, not, as given by Minonzio (*Introduzione*, 15), "early" (*agli inizi*) in 1532. Thus his appointment followed, and did not precede, Pompeo's death. For Pompeo's unsuccessful administration of Naples and his sudden death in 1532, see also Brundin, *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics of the Italian Reformation*, 122.

19. According to Giovio in his biography of Pompeo Colonna, originally published, together with his lives of Popes Leo X and Adrian VI, in Florence in 1548 (ex officina Laurentii Torrentini), with the Italian translation by Lodovico Domenichi of that work appearing from the same press in 1549; but see now *Pompeii Columnae cardinalis vita*, in Giovio, *Opera*, vol. 6: *Vitarum, pars prior*, ed. Michele Cataudella (Rome: Istituto poligrafico e zecca dello stato, 1987), 189–90. The latter edition is cited henceforth as Giovio, *Pompeii Columnae vita*. [Minonzio, *Introduzione*, 16n16]

without vocation, as but one of the numerous appurtenances of his noble rank; one who moved against the pope, whether Julius II or Clement VII, with a determination explicable only as fueled by strictly political and dynastic interests. Alongside this predominant image a second one surfaces, attested not only by his performance of his ecclesiastical duties, which is well-documented, but also by his patronage of the arts, his earnest promotion of the intellectual life, and his engagement in literary pursuits. Rather, it is precisely these facets of his character which, in their strident dissonance with a wholly incompatible identity, denote the complexity, and indeed the stubborn contradictions of his historical persona: for in him the arms of Mars pose an antithesis not only to the cardinal's hat, but also, incontestably, to the gentler and kinder implements of writing.

This issue, which is absolutely central for this book, deserves to be briefly foreshadowed here. Although Colonna's identity as a poet is fragile [. . .],²⁰ more substantial and significant is his identity as a Latin prose author. Setting aside his Latin writings of an economic and juridical nature (or his vernacular letters of an administrative and political character), his Latin prose composition is documented, in one instance, by the brief prefatory letter to Agostino Nifo's *De pulchro et amore* (*On Beauty and On Love*, 1549) that Pompeo addresses to its author.²¹ That letter echoes Nifo's discussion to some extent in distinguishing between the Platonic and the Aristotelian concepts of beauty—although in Colonna's preface, the conceptualization of both arguments is thin. Of Colonna's Latin prose

20. Colonna's minor poetical work, a Latin epigram dedicated to Maria d'Aragona, survives, while those he is said to have composed in praise of Isabella Villamarino are lost, and the attribution to him of the sonnet *S'io potessi sfrondar dall'ampia e folta* is far from certain. See Minonzio, *Introduzione*, 16–17n18.

21. Colonna's prefatory letter is found in Agostino Nifo's *Libri duo: De pulchro primus; De amore secundus* (Lyon: Apud Godefridum et Marcellum Beringos fratres, 1549), cc. A1v–A2r, and is transcribed from that edition in Minonzio, *Difesa*, 113n6; the 1549 edition is online at Gallica: <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k67890w>>. The letter also appears in the earlier 1531 edition *Ad illustriss. Ioannam Aragoniam Tagliacocii principem de pulchro liber* (Rome: Apud Antonium Bladum, 1531), cc. A2r–A2v; and in the modern bilingual edition, *De pulchro et amore / Du beau et de l'amour*, ed. and trans. [from Latin to French] Laurence Boulègue (Paris: Les belles lettres, 2003), at 2–5. Minonzio observes that in another of Nifo's works, the *De re aulica* (Naples: Joannes Antonius de Caneto papiensis, 1534), at c. aiiiv, the author comments that Colonna had convinced him of female excellence: “Pompeius enim Colonna principum splendor illustrissimus in eo libello quem Apologiam mulierum nuncupavit adeo mihi mulierum praestantiam persuasit ut non modo nostro libello te mulierem dignam putem, sed ut mulier quam vir esse malim” (For Pompeo Colonna, that most resplendent of princes, in his little book entitled *Apologia mulierum* so persuaded me of female excellence that not only do I view you, a woman, as worthy, in this little book of mine, but I myself would prefer to be a woman than a man). The woman Nifo addresses is Giovanna d'Aragona, duchess of Tagliacozzo (and incidentally sister-in-law of Vittoria Colonna), the dedicatee of Nifo's *De pulchro*. [Minonzio, *Introduzione*, 17–18n21]

writing, instead, the principal evidence is his *Apologia mulierum* (*In Defense of Women*) [. . .].²²

It is a work, to speak truly, about which some suspicion has arisen—although no proof has been offered—that it was not the fruit of his labors: a suspicion arising from the reasonable premise that a brutal soldier, an aggressive contender both within and outside the church, could not have done other than commission the drafting of a work on so courtly a theme from some hired humanist’s pen (to whom, as might be more likely, he could instead have entrusted the revision of the text). This conjecture is always advanced in hushed tones, contradicted by contemporary testimony, and never resolved by a positive declaration or even a malevolent one. It is a conjecture, therefore, of no value; but if in the event, to be absurd, that there was a well-founded hypothesis, the question would merely shift to the reasons for his choice to deal with precisely that problem, and in that form. On this matter we shall merely for now observe that in the choice of this theme various particular data of his biography must have played some role. Foremost among these is his kinship with such a woman as Vittoria Colonna,²³ profoundly admired for her intellectual and moral eminence; but no less significant—to be

22. Omitted here is Minonzio’s comment on his own volume, from which the present one draws: “the Latin text of which [the *Apologia*] appears in this volume, together with its first translation into a modern language, with critical commentary.” The volume before you, instead, contains the English translation of the *Apologia* based on Minonzio’s Latin edition, and is accordingly, to our knowledge, the second translation of the Latin text into a modern language.

23. For Vittoria Colonna (1490–1547), arguably the foremost woman poet, thinker, and spiritual seeker of the Italian Renaissance, see especially Giorgio Patrizi, “Colonna, Vittoria,” *DBI* 27 (1982), 448–57, <https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vittoria-colonna_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/>; the bibliographical overview by Abigail Brundin, “Vittoria Colonna,” in *Oxford Bibliographies: Renaissance and Reformation*, <<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399301/obo-9780195399301-0077.xml>>; the collection edited by Abigail Brundin, Tatiana Crivelli, and Maria Serena Sapegno, *A Companion to Vittoria Colonna* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); the collection edited by Virginia Cox and Shannon McHugh, *Vittoria Colonna: Poetry, Religion, Art, Impact* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021); Abigail Brundin’s study *Vittoria Colonna and the Spiritual Poetics*; the recent biography by Targoff, *Renaissance Woman*; and the classic biography by Alfred von Reumont, *Vittoria Colonna: Vita, fede e poesia nel secolo decimosesto*, ed. and trans. Giuseppe Müller and Ermanno Ferreiro (Turin: Loescher, 1883; 2nd ed., 1892), from the German original, *Vittoria Colonna: Leben, Dichten, Glauben im XVI. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1881). See also Suzanne Thérault, *Un cénacle humaniste de la Renaissance autour de Vittoria Colonna, châtelaine d’Ischia* (Florence: Sansoni, 1968), and essays and illustrations in the exhibition catalog edited by Sylvia Ferino-Magden, *Vittoria Colonna: Dichterin und Muse Michelangelos* (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum; Milan: Skira, 1997). Vittoria Colonna is also featured prominently in important recent studies and compilations of Italian women writers of this era: see especially Virginia Cox, *Lyric Poetry by Women of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013); Cox, *Women’s Writing in Italy*; and Diana M. Robin, *Publishing Women: Salons, the Presses, and the Counter-Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), especially 1–40 and 79–101.

cynical—his masculine, attentive, and mindful predilection for that feminine universe toward the frequentation of which the sensual dimension of his own soul inclined him.

It would be too easy to dismiss this brief work as a homage to a set of issues that, even if they do not quite merit the characterization of “faddish,” were certainly, in these years, “in the air.” Similarly, I would discourage the notion that an individual of Pompeo’s stature might opportunistically seek to compose a work that could, by its artful self-presentation, distinguish him from the signorial type and display him instead in a contrary posture, more “modern” and “civil” than that of his feudal identity of man-at-arms. That suggestion, however, seems to be excluded by the fact that the work was never published and scantily circulated.

More solidly grounded is the hypothesis that views the work’s conception and composition as a reflection of Colonna’s desire to insert himself, displaying his full grasp of the matter, in a lively subject of aristocratic discussion during the late 1520s: the social recognition of female worth and capacity, a matter that the manuscript circulation of the *Courtier* in the cultural world of Naples, followed later by its publication (1528), brought to actualization.²⁴

In sum, although it is consistent with his biography, Colonna’s object in this work is surely not a contrived, wholly superficial, self-representation that distances him from the coarse and perfunctory cultural inclinations of an obsolescent nobility. Rather, he exhibits an openness, probably reflecting the influence of his cousin Vittoria, to a very different sensibility, to a more developed conception of nobility, comprising notions of interior strength, of dignity, and of moral energy. The vicissitudes of 1527 may have necessitated such a reconsideration of the meaning of nobility, as they had sharpened and heightened in the Italian aristocracy a distinct awareness of the crucial role that women had been called upon to perform, and did in fact perform, in that historical crisis. [. . .]²⁵

24. Composed over two decades, Castiglione’s *Cortegiano* (*The Book of the Courtier*) was published in Venice and Florence in 1528. The circulation among Neapolitan litterati of an early manuscript version of the *Cortegiano* is attested by three letters of Castiglione to Vittoria Colonna, and one of hers to him. Castiglione had entrusted the work to Colonna for her response, and she had pledged not to transcribe it and share it with others—a promise she broke. The letters are those of March 21, August 25, and September 21, 1525, from Castiglione to Vittoria, responding to hers of September 20, 1524, in which she assured him that she would not circulate his book. These letters are found in Colonna’s *Carteggio*, ed. Ermanno Ferrero and Giuseppe Müller, 2nd ed., with supplement by Domenico Tordi (Turin: Loescher, 1892), respectively at 26–27 (letter XIX); 47–48 (letter XXXIII); 48–51 (letter XXXIV); and 23–26 (letter XVIII). An English translation of Colonna’s letter to Castiglione of September 20, 1524, is found in Vittoria Colonna, *Selected Letters, 1523–1546: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. Veronica Copello, trans. Abigail Brundin (New York and Toronto: Iter Press, 2022), 44–46 (letter 5); the Italian text follows at 46–48. [Minonzio, Introduzione, 19n22]

25. Two discussions begin here that are omitted in this translation of the Minonzio *Introduzione* as not essential for an understanding of the text. The first is a substantial section (Minonzio, *Introduzione*,