

38. **STUIBER, Maria**, *Zwischen Rom und dem Erdkreis. Die gelehrte Korrespondenz des Kardinals Stefano Borgia (1731–1804)*. (Colloquia Augustana; 31). Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2012. 460 pp.

Stefano Borgia was born in Velletri. His family, in spite of the name Borgia, cannot be traced back to the famous Aragonese Borjas. Stefano's uncle Alessandro Borgia, the well-reputed and erudite archbishop and prince of Fermo, became the young man's teacher, role model and quasi father (p. 77). Stefano studied philosophy and theology, showed great archeological interest and talent, and when he left his uncle's palace in 1756, he was immediately received into the *Respublica litteraria*: the time's scientific community, the - so to speak - supranational state of scholars: a commonwealth of learning that communicated especially through letter writing.

This kind of long distance interaction has found historians' increasing attention: network analysis of learned letters. It was not only his education that allowed Stefano Borgia to correspond easily within that international *Respublica*, it would soon also be his position: Stefano Borgia moved to Rome, lived at the *Accademia Ecclesiastica* and obtained a canon law doctorate from Sapienza University only a year later. After his 1757 Ascension homily for the Pope and the Cardinals, he moved to the waiting list for an administrative career in the Papal States (p. 85). He served as a governor for five years and as secretary to various Roman dicasteries before reaching his great platform: he was made secretary of the *Propaganda Fide* congregation. Now, he could write letters without even having to pay postage or taxes (p. 200). Interested in Eastern cultures, he manifested a particular liking of the Oriental Churches. Especially challenging countries were, for the Congregation, Ethiopia, Madagascar, the English colonies of North America and, of course, China. The new secretary stood for "progressive mission politics." That is to say, he "gave priority to the needs and views of the missions and missionaries" (p. 93), rather than to political conflicts of patronage and the rites controversy. In 1773, he effected the abolition of the Propaganda's prohibition to use the Chinese language in liturgical prayers and hymns, and pleaded for the consecration of native Chinese bishops. With the suppression of the Society of Jesus, the *Propaganda* lost an important resource. Borgia successfully protested against the Jesuits' revocation from China: the Fathers could not be replaced, he argued, and therefore should continue their work as diocesan clergy (p. 94). His pro-Jesuit views and actions made the Romans mock that Ignatius of Loyola had founded, Francis Borgia had enlarged, and Stephan Borgia had re-instituted the Society of Jesus (p. 95).

The learned secretary obviously wanted to pass on his cultured attitude to the next generation of intercultural mediators in the Church: "Borgia gave great importance to the *Collegium Urbanum*, which trained, at that time, more than 80 students from Europe, Asia, Africa and America to be priests in the mission countries. His interest in the history, culture, language and religions of the peoples [...] was, among other things, driven by his idea that future missionaries should be educated in those matters" (p. 95).

When Stefano was 58, he finally became a Cardinal. He and his contemporaries found that to be rather late: after 19 years a secretary to *De Propaganda Fide*. Why the delay? Was it because of his overly active organisation of the dicastery (p. 97)? Was it because the European powers did not want to see another Cardinal Borgia (p. 99)? We do not know.

The German historian Maria Stuiber started her studies on Cardinal Stefano Borgia at Bamberg University, first directed by Horst Enzensberger; at Augsburg University, under the supervision of Wolfgang E.J. Weber, she completed her doctoral research. The book is its published version. She conducts a contextualised network analysis of Borgia's correspondence. On p. 134, she has drawn a map showing the origins of the "learned letters to Stefano Borgia." We find senders in China, India, the Philippines, Africa, many from Northern Europe, expectably a dense web in what is today Italy, but none East of Königsberg: Russia remains a world of its own. This is insightful, but so far, we have no other letter *corpora* analysed with a similar approach, so comparisons remain tentative. What we can compare are the numbers of learned letters and numbers of correspondents. With some 2000 letters, the Borgia estate is relatively small, but the number of some 600 senders is slightly more than average (p. 136).

The book teaches us a lot on letter culture, not only on style (p. 182) but also on the

technicalities: while shipping a letter from Stockholm to Rome normally took some three months, surface mail from Altona to the *Urbs Æeterna* was predicted to take - and did take - exactly 17 days; a letter from Naples to Rome, by contrast, was only 27 hours on the way (p. 205). It was relatively easy and reliable to get a piece of paper from one place to another within Europe; but sending objects - books, archeological, geological and zoological findings - was difficult, expensive, risky and, therefore, rare (cfr. p. 347).

What does a study of Stefan Borgia's correspondence tell us about 18th century European culture? On the technical side, one finds an efficient postal system in Europe, but the need to resort to unofficial transport methods in the case of non-European correspondence: travellers or trade ships transmitted the letters. On the human side, one should not quickly generalise the findings, but at least for the Cardinal himself, it seems fair to summarise Mrs. Stuiber's evidence in seven theses. 1. Bridging geography: Borgia was interested in human encounter beyond physical vicinity, and that was not unusual for men of his culture and position. 2. Bridging history: Borgia was interested in knowledge beyond temporal vicinity, and such historical curiosity was typical, indeed indicative of erudite 18th century writers. 3. Bridging science: Borgia's learning was not limited to a particular area of knowledge; he was, rather, an interdisciplinary person—and he was not only a theorist but also an administrator and decision maker in the Church, thus integrating practice into his approach to the world. 4. Bridging nation: Borgia was, as member of the scholars' 'meta nation', interested in contacts with people beyond his own national belonging. 5. Bridging informants: he was successful in finding people that would provide the factual knowledge he was looking for. 6. Bridging relations: he invested in the personal side of some of his correspondents and made, in spite of the geographical distance, friends. 7. Creating borders: "Still, his more or less world-wide network of correspondency remains Christian and European—although it had, by contrast with most other contemporary correspondences, strikingly open windows and doors to the extra-European world. [...] Europe's learned discourse was maintained exclusively by European, Christian protagonists, even when it discussed non-European subjects and objects" (p. 347); and on the horizon, in spite of such multilingual exchanges, another creation of borders now rises: "In the *Respublica litteraria*, learned discussions took place mainly within increasingly secluded *national* spaces" (p. 347, my emphasis). - *Felix Körner*, SJ.