

of *Opinion*, which stands for the verisimilar and for ambiguous answers; the ruby symbolizes the true word of philosophy. The form of the *dit* is then matched with the diamond, whose virtue does not fail despite its obscurity, and with the cameo as both are multiple and ambiguous. The narrative of the *livre en prose*, on the other hand, aspires to the clarity of the ruby.

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Guicciardini, Francesco. 2023. *Ricordi*, edited by Matteo Palumbo. Torino: Einaudi. ISBN 8806251716. Pp. 602 (I–XLVII).

Written between 1512 and 1530, Francesco Guicciardini's *Ricordi* (also known to English readers as *Maxims and Reflections* or *Counsels and Reflections*)¹ poses a challenging philological problem due to the different versions of his work that Guicciardini wrote during those years. This new edition, published with an introduction and a commentary by Matteo Palumbo, collects the most advanced and state-of-the-art results of the *Ricordi*'s philology. This includes the critical edition of Guicciardini's last version of *Ricordi*, published by Matteo Palumbo in 2009,² and the critical edition of the previous versions of the work, newly established by Pierre Jodogne.³

In the introduction, M. Palumbo points out how in Italy the interpretation of Guicciardini's work, particularly of *Ricordi*, is hindered by "the shadow

1. The best English translation, based on the critical text edited by Raffaele Spongano (GUICCIARDINI 1951), is GUICCIARDINI 1972. In 2000 an English edition was published by G. R. Berridge (GUICCIARDINI 2000), which, however, takes up the 1890 translation by N. Hill Thomson, and rearranges the *Ricordi* on the basis of common thematic threads. In this review I'll refer to the book as *Ricordi*, and to the single aphorisms as *ricordo* (singular) or *ricordi* (plural), without capitalization.

2. GUICCIARDINI 2009.

3. The description of the main manuscripts — Q1, Q2, B, and C — are in GUICCIARDINI 1951.

of De Sanctis” (ix), the renowned idealist critic who, conceiving Italian literary history as the development of the spirit of a people, could not be but truly perplexed by a mercurial and programmatically unstable thought like that of Guicciardini (an idealistic reading of Guicciardini’s thought would recognize it as a thought that dwells on the negative and antithetical phase of the movement of the spirit — which perhaps would not have displeased the Adorno of *Minima Moralia*). However, M. Palumbo notes that even more favorable critics, such as Vittorio De Capraris, tended to relegate *Ricordi* among Guicciardini’s minor and, all in all, negligible works. One of the most important results of the present edition is undoubtedly that of having demonstrated the centrality of *Ricordi* in Guicciardini’s entire production, as well as its great modernity [“This theoretical Guicciardini [. . .] still has got some unfinished business with his other readers, as well as with the new ones” (xi)].

M. Palumbo identifies the year 1951 as “a turning point between one season of studies and another” (x). Indeed, in that year, Raffaele Spongano published the first critical edition of *Ricordi*. In addition to that edition, there are the studies on the previous versions of the work by Mario Fubini and Emanuella Scarano,⁴ Jean Louis Fournel and Jean-Claude Zancarini, and Amedeo Quondam, all studies by which the novelty of Guicciardini’s thought in the development of modern ethics is “once and for all” acknowledged. These authors serve as the main references for M. Palumbo’s commentary on *Ricordi*, along with a small (but carefully chosen) group of other scholars, from Nencioni to Mengaldo to Lavagetto. A point of contact between Guicciardini’s way of writing *Ricordi* and M. Palumbo’s commentary on the work is the practice of attentive bibliographical economy, a choice that is not immediate or easy but is effectively pursued throughout the commentary.

M. Palumbo recognizes the year 1527, referred to as the “*annus horribilis*”, as a milestone in the formation of *Ricordi*. In various passages of version C, completed by 1530, M. Palumbo convincingly identifies the signs of the enormous uncertainty that spread throughout Italy after the sack of Rome. “Public life, the nature of governments, the role of ambassadors, and the private world [. . .] are all scrutinized as fragments of a shattered totality, which cannot be recomposed in any order whatsoever” (xiv), writes M. Palumbo, simultaneously highlighting four of the main thematic axes of *Ricordi* and his commentary.

4. FUBINI 1947; SCARANO 1980.

In Guicciardini's writing of *Ricordi*, M. Palumbo sees the "construction of a wisdom" (xiv), a wisdom constantly returning to the observation of particulars, making reflections that are never final. It is a wisdom in constant motion, sometimes even in apparently contradictory ways: Guicciardini's prose is "branched", with the aim of constant research of a "knowledge aware of the variety of circumstances" (xvii). This knowledge is achieved through "*discretion*" (a key term for Guicciardini), meaning the ability to circumscribe all the implications and logical aspects of specific problems, all while remaining "restless, alarmed every time by the risk of making mistakes" (7). Guicciardini's goal is knowledge primarily based on the direct experience of things: several times in *Ricordi*, Guicciardini warns against relying solely on book knowledge. The purpose of this knowledge is not the establishment of a set of rules — M. Palumbo warns that "there is no rule" (xvii) from the very first pages of his commentary — but rather the achievement of a "shifting disposition" (xvii) that provides orientation, albeit precarious, in the chaos of existence. In the most dramatic scenarios, it leads to a deeper awareness of the inevitability of that chaos.

At various points in his commentary, M. Palumbo proposes some interesting comparisons with other authors not necessarily aware of Guicciardini's work. These authors can be almost contemporary, like Montaigne, or much later, like Gramsci, Spengler, Svevo. Of particular relevance in this elusive and intermittent "Guicciardini's wave" is the case of Leopardi, an author M. Palumbo refers to several times in his commentary. Leopardi's negative philosophy appears to share many points of contact with Guicciardini's. In the impossibility of finding any rule in the political action that characterizes various *ricordi*, one is tempted to see a possible parallel with some political sections of *Zhuangzi*, a Chinese book dating back to an era between the 5th and 3rd centuries BCE. *Zhuangzi* shares with *Ricordi* a lively awareness of the irreducibility of a particular situation to a general rule; this affinity with one of the fundamental texts of Eastern knowledge can perhaps explain the profound interest that Guicciardini's work has recently sparked in Japan and China.⁵

On the other hand, the search for what Guicciardini's sources might have been, as M. Palumbo warns, is an arduous if not impossible undertaking because Guicciardini very rarely explicitly cites the authors he refers to (e.g., Tacitus). Concerning the influences of Stoic philosophy, the presence of Epictetus, and especially Seneca, among Guicciardini's readings can be considered certain (and the reader finds it duly indicated

5. GUICCIARDINI 2012 and GUICCIARDINI 1996.

in the commentary on individual passages), but in general M. Palumbo chooses, once again in coherence with the form of *Ricordi* itself, to “explain Guicciardini with Guicciardini” (xxiv). Therefore, while more extensive exploration of other contemporary authors could have shed light on the diffusion of the themes and problems developed in *Ricordi*, the commentary does not lack precise references to the works of authors such as Savonarola, Pomponazzi, Erasmus, and others. Inevitably, there are also numerous references to Machiavelli, who is a constant presence in M. Palumbo’s notes on individual *ricordi*. Also, narrowing the focus is a choice that has the very important advantage of leading the reader towards an immersion in Guicciardini’s conceptual and stylistic world, and to a full concentration on the content of the text of *Ricordi*, and this undoubtedly was also Guicciardini’s own aim when he was writing.

As for Guicciardini’s logical procedures, M. Palumbo refers to the studies of Carlo Diano, especially Diano’s observation that Guicciardini’s syllogism exhibits more of a Stoic than an Aristotelian feature. According to Diano, the Stoic syllogism primarily focuses on particular and contingent cases, while the Aristotelian syllogism is based on substances. Another important point of reference are Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo’s observations on the logical connections and the phrase construction in Guicciardini. The commentary systematically follows the text in an analytical manner, concentrating on each *ricordo* through marginal notes and general note. These notes serve to clarify the most challenging aspects of Guicciardini’s thought. In addition to emphasizing the uniqueness of each individual fragment of thought in *Ricordi*, M. Palumbo also highlights elements of continuity with other *ricordi*, the thematic threads to which Guicciardini returns most frequently, the reappearance of certain ideas in other works by Guicciardini, and, when necessary, offers insights into previous versions or corrections made by Guicciardini, so that the commentary moves in constant synergy with the philological operation behind the texts (see below).

The attention paid to the lexicon is particularly interesting. During the analysis of the various *ricordi*, M. Palumbo isolates individual words that take on a richer meaning in Guicciardini’s work, starting with the title of the collection itself. While for his contemporary authors, the word “*ricordi*” usually meant “memoirs (intended for the circle of family members)”, in Guicciardini, the term takes on the broader meaning of “warning, suggestion, advice” (hence, the difficulty of translating the title of the work into other languages) (xvi). Therefore, M. Palumbo, proceeding from *ricordo* to *ricordo*, isolates a set of key terms (such as *tormento*, *ingenuità*,

libertà, uguaglianza, particolare, and many others), each time emphasizing their significance and the unique semantic features they acquire in Guicciardini's language. Moreover, G. Palumbo and T. Zanato had already identified in *Ricordi* what Zanato called "shuttle words", i.e., terms that contribute to delineating elements of thematic continuity between distinct *ricordi*. A notable example of the complex semantic density characterizing Guicciardini's language is *interesse* ("interest"), a word that in *ricordo* 218 undergoes a sort of a lexical twist. In that specific passage, Guicciardini interprets it differently, as meaning that one's true interest should not be gain or material advantages, but "*l'honore*" and "*sapere mantenersi la riputazione et el buono nome*" ("honour" and "knowing how to maintain one's reputation and good name"). Hence, we can see how in Guicciardini, even individual words can be subject to the unstoppable mutability of everything. Also noteworthy are M. Palumbo's observations on logical connections, which are often decisive for unraveling Guicciardini's thought. Among the many examples, one can point out the use of *nondimeno* ("nonetheless"), explicitly linked to Machiavellian *nondimanco* — and, of course, to Carlo Ginzburg's recent work about it.

As mentioned previously, the critical text has been established by M. Palumbo's son, based on his recent diplomatic edition of *Ricordi*. In his introduction, G. Palumbo retraces the history of the various versions of *Ricordi*, providing stemmata that offer a detailed overview of the relationships between the different versions.

Starting in 1512, Guicciardini began to collect his reflections in a notebook (conventionally referred to as Q^1) which he then copied into a second notebook (Q^2), making changes and additions with new aphorisms. Between 1523 and 1524, Guicciardini wrote a further series of thoughts (A), but this version A only survives in copies by others. In 1528, Guicciardini reunited Q^2 and A in a new series (B), again adding new thoughts. Finally, in 1530, he wrote a new collection, which took the title of *Ricordi* and contained the final text (C). Before that, Guicciardini usually referred to his thoughts as *ghiribizi*, a word that can be translated as "whims" or "quirks". As noted by Spongano in his critical edition, B and C represent two texts that can only partially overlap. To explain this discrepancy, which significantly interrupts an otherwise uniform series of versions, G. Palumbo suggests, based on compelling but not necessarily undeniable textual clues (specifically, some marks Guicciardini made on C but not on B), the hypothesis that when writing C, Guicciardini did not have B at hand but that nevertheless he remembered it quite precisely.

Given this textual situation, in 1932, Michele Barbi proposed two possible solutions: either to opt for a “linear” edition, in which the main text of C would be followed by the previous versions as they were assembled by Guicciardini, or to create a “pyramidal” edition, in which each individual *ricordo* of C would have the corresponding sections of the other versions (if they existed) beneath it. This would mean that the structure of the other versions, particularly B, would be completely disrupted (though recoverable by the reader through apparatus notes). Spongano chose the latter solution. The studies following Spongano’s edition, however, as well as M. Palumbo’s commentary itself, have clearly highlighted how the various *ricordi*, although independent of each other, do not follow a random order, either in C or in B: this edition therefore preferred the linear solution. Thus, version C being obviously published as the main text, B maintains its original structure and is published in an appendix. Thus, even if this edition is the result of three distinct works, it holds together firmly in all its parts, and also as a whole. The editors have left open the problem of A, which would have required the recension and the subsequent collation of the surviving copies, a task that is anything but simple, as already noted by Barbi, and which can be considered the future final step for a fully complete critical edition of all the *Ricordi*’s versions.

In his introduction to C’s critical text, G. Palumbo reconstructs in detail the various phases summarized above, and then indicates the criteria by which the text has been published. Overall, the objective was to put the reader in contact, as near as one can get, with the materiality of C.G. Palumbo has set up a complex but very rational system of symbols, enabling the reader to recognize all the various interventions made by Guicciardini during the writing of C. One can thus quickly reconstruct the deletions, second thoughts and corrections implemented by Guicciardini during the drafting of C (and, as seen above, it is not uncommon for such variants and corrections to be useful in M. Palumbo’s commentary). Furthermore, the *ricordi* that can be connected to B are also accompanied by references to the corresponding *ghiribizi* of B and, if applicable, also to Q^1 and Q^2 . Even the graphic rendering of the text is consistent with the objective of offering the reader an image as faithful as possible to Guicciardini’s original. Apart from minimal interventions on the use of the letter *h*, the separation of some words, and the use of capital letters, Guicciardini’s handwriting has been closely maintained. The edition of B, newly edited by Jodogne based on Guicciardini’s manuscript, introduces some corrections to the text that had been established by Spongano in 1951. Every single *ghiribizo* has at its bottom the correspondent versions of Q^1 and Q^2 , if they exist. Jodogne

also adds some valuable observations on Guicciardini's use of diacritics. It is known that, at that time, the system of diacritical signs had not yet been established. Jodogne observes a significant evolution in Guicciardini himself in the use of his own diacritical signs, which are limited to a diagonal stroke, colons, and the still point (only used to indicate the end of every *ghiribizo*). Both G. Palumbo and Jodogne decided to adopt the modern usage, which is a fully acceptable choice given the profound difference between Guicciardini's usage of diacritics and ours. However, given the growing academic interest in the history of diacritics, it could be interesting to have a precise record in the apparatus of the interventions made. Furthermore, in the appendix to B, passages from A are reported that did not merge into B (for the text of A, the reconstruction proposed by Spongano is adopted). The transcription criteria adopted by Jodogne fully conform to those of G. Palumbo.

As a whole, this edition aims to restore and explore the writer's process from the moment of drafting his work to its final result and beyond, following a philological tradition that finds a recent point of reference in Dante Isella (explicitly referred to by G. Palumbo). Given the nature of *Ricordi* and its textual history, this is undoubtedly the best possible approach. The collaboration between the three scholars, which M. Palumbo himself describes as "an unparalleled joy" (xxv), offers the reader a truly coherent and coordinated edition, highly recommended for its scientific value.

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