



*Performing Power in Early
Renaissance Italy: Princely Image
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Performing Power in Early Renaissance Italy: Princely Image and Consensus in Political Treatises

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Abstract: This article investigates how the idea of performing power becomes crucial in Italian Renaissance political thought. The analysis focuses on two pre-Machiavellian mirrors for princes written in the second half of the fifteenth century in the kingdom of Naples, under the Aragonese monarchy: Giovanni Pontano's *De principe* (1465) and Giuniano Maio's *De maiestate* (1492), respectively in Neo-Latin and the vernacular. These are the first Italian political treatises where the concept of majesty is systematically theorized and is linked with the practical aspects of the art of governing and the performance of power. In particular, the whole second part of Pontano's text defines and illustrates the virtue of majesty as coinciding with the "external" image of princely rulership and with all concrete strategies deployed by the prince to gain consensus. This concept is recovered and emphasized in Maio's *De maiestate*, the first treatise entirely devoted to this key aspect of kingship, to the extent that the figure of ideal princeps is encapsulated in the all-encompassing notion of majesty, the virtue that becomes the most important royal attribute. Thus, this new theory of statecraft, with a specific focus on the image that the ruler is able to give to his subjects and on the importance of the people's consent, displays the emergence of a blossoming idea of political realism, which is specific to this age and context and would develop in more mature forms in the following century.

Keywords: Italian Renaissance literature; performing power; Aragonese monarchy; Naples; Giovanni Pontano; Giuniano Maio; Mirrors for Princes; political theory

Princely Power in Fifteenth-Century Mirrors for Princes: The Case of Naples

In the evolution of political thought in early modern Europe, a considerable contribution was made by theories conceived and put forward in Italy between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In this period the affirmation of princely ideologies throughout the peninsula was closely intertwined with the consolidation of centralized political powers in most Italian states, which were often ruled by newly established leaders. Especially in the second half of the fifteenth century, humanists and intellectuals played an active role in the elaboration of a political theory that could answer to the needs of new rulers, who had to strengthen their authority and find new sources of legitimacy in an age

when the “universalistic” institutions of medieval Europe, the Church and the Empire, had partially lost their centrality in bestowing sovereignty rights.¹ This process is reflected in the substantial production of political treatises written as mirrors for princes:² a traditional literary genre that enjoyed remarkable diffusion in this age and, in this specific historical context, became the expression of the emergence of a form of personalistic power based on the notion of human virtue, which is now the main factor able to legitimize political authority.³ However, although this political speculation has usually been regarded in traditional scholarship as merely ethically centred and in some ways naive, more recently this general characterization has started to be seen as the result of oversimplifications. In particular, scholars have underlined the need for a new approach in the study of fifteenth-century political literature, recognizing in it a multifaceted output that has to be reconsidered in light of a more wide-ranging and thorough analysis of multiple sources, belonging to different literary spheres (treatises, history, oratory).⁴ This is what this contribution aims to do by adopting a more comprehensive approach that can reveal how humanists put forward their political thought through various textual forms and strategies (often overlapping among each other in the same work), which prove to be more than rhetorical tools but ingenious channels for innovative political ideologies. Such a theorisation, despite recovering ancient sources and springing from classical ethical tenets, ended up going beyond traditional views and reworked them in political models that could be applied to actual states and current historical circumstances, revealing a developing realistic and practical approach.

¹ On political thought in Renaissance Italy, see: Nicolai Rubinstein, “Italian Political Thought, 1450–1539,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700*, ed. James Henderson Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 30–65; Nicolai Rubinstein, “Political Theories in the Renaissance,” in *Political Theories in the Renaissance*, ed. by A. Chastel et al. (London: Methuen, 1982), 153–200; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, vol. 2, *Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Manlio Pastore Stocchi, “Il pensiero politico degli umanisti,” in Manlio Pastore Stocchi, *Pagine di storia dell’Umanesimo italiano* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2014), 26–84; Guido Cappelli, *Maiestas: politica e pensiero politico nella Napoli aragonese (1443–1503)* (Roma: Carocci Editore, 2016); James Hankins, *Virtue Politics. Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019).

² On mirrors for princes produced in Italy in this age see Felix Gilbert, “The Humanist Concept of the Prince and The Prince of Machiavelli,” in Felix Gilbert, *History: Choice and Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 91–114; Skinner, *The Foundations*, 1:113–138; Peter Stacey, *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Davide Canfora, *Prima di Machiavelli: Politica e cultura in età umanistica* (Bari: Laterza, 2005); Hankins, *Virtue Politics*; Cappelli, *Maiestas*. See also Giacomo Ferraù, “Introduzione,” in Bartholomaei Platinae *De principe*, edited by Giacomo Ferraù (Messina: Il Vespro, 1979), 5–33; Guido Cappelli, “Introduzione,” in Giovanni Pontano, *De principe*, edited by Guido Cappelli (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2003), XI–LX.

³ On these general phenomena and the importance of the notion of virtue in Renaissance political theories see in particular Skinner, *Visions*, 2:123; Hankins, *Virtue Politics*, 36–37; Rubinstein, “Political Theories.”

⁴ The need for a new approach in the study and evaluation of fifteenth-century political thought is underlined in Guido Cappelli, Review of Gabriele Pedullà, *Machiavelli in tumulto: conquista, cittadinanza e conflitto nei “Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio,” Cuadernos de Filología Italiana* 20 (2013): 359–360; new perspectives also in Cappelli, *Maiestas*; Pastore Stocchi, “Il pensiero politico,” 26–84; and Hankins, *Virtue Politics*.

This phenomenon is particularly evident if we consider the cultural and historical context of the kingdom of Naples, where some of the most important political works written in the late fifteenth century start to gradually look at the concrete aspects of politics and the ideal ruler's actual actions. This article seeks to make a contribution to this research field by focusing on this specific cultural area and on two texts that represent significant case studies: works that for the first time concentrate on the notion of majesty, which is seen as the distinctive royal essence of the king consisting in all behaviours that allow him to convey this authentic princely image.⁵ Such a virtue reveals the gradual emergence of a new more pragmatic attitude in devising prototypes of monarchical rulership. These treatises are two mirrors for princes produced in Naples under the Aragonese monarchy: Giovanni Pontano's *De principe* (*On the prince*, 1465)⁶ and Giuniano Maio's *De maiestate* (*On majesty*, 1492);⁷ the former, and more famous, written in Neo-Latin, as is usual in this period, and the latter in the vernacular. It is no coincidence that the production of political treatises reached a climax in the second half of the fifteenth century, especially in the area of Naples. Here, from 1442, the newly established Aragonese monarchy (following the conquest by Alfonso the Magnanimous) built a well-articulated system of cultural politics, with the close collaboration of intellectuals, humanists, and artists. More specifically, the substantial expansion of the mirrors-for-princes genre, together with the simultaneous development of political historiography (with historical works by Lorenzo Valla, Bartolomeo Facio, Antonio Panormita, Giovanni Albino, and Pontano himself),⁸ has to be traced back to the need for new principles on which rulers could

⁵ For an in-depth discussion of this virtue in Pontano's work, see: Pontano, *De principe*, XCIII–CVI.

⁶ The edition of the text is Pontano, *De principe*; an English translation in *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts: II. Political Philosophy*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 2:69–86. On this treatise and more generally on Pontano's political thought see also Cappelli, *Maiestas*, 89–161; Claudio Finzi, *Re, baroni, popolo: La politica di Giovanni Pontano* (Rimini: Il Cerchio Iniziative Editoriali, 2004); Matthias Roick, *Pontano's virtues. Aristotelian moral and political thought in the Renaissance* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

⁷ The edition of the text is Giuniano Maio, *De maiestate*, edited by Franco Gaeta (Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1956); on Maio and his work see also Marta Celati, "Teoria politica e realtà storica nel *De maiestate* di Giuniano Maio: tra letteratura e arte figurativa," *Medioevo e Rinascimento* 29 (2018), 203–235; Marta Celati, "La virtù e la storia: il principe nel *De maiestate* di Giuniano Maio," *Archivum Mentis* 8 (2019), 71–102; Marta Celati, "Classical Sources and a New Theory of the State in the Renaissance: A Neapolitan Mirror for Princes," *Annali d'Italianistica*, 38 (2020), 19–45; Cappelli, *Maiestas*, 188–194; Joana Barreto, *La majesté en images: portraits du pouvoir dans la Naples des Aragon* (Roma: École française de Rome, 2013), 230–249; and Angela Maria Caracciolo Aricò, "Giuniano Maio," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, dir. Alberto M. Ghisalberti, Massimiliano Pavan, Fiorella Bartocchini, Mario Caravale (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960–) (from now on DBI), vol. 67 (2006), 618–621.

⁸ On Neapolitan historiography and Aragonese cultural politics, see: Jerry H. Bentley, *Politics and Culture in Renaissance Naples* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Giacomo Ferraù, *Il tessitore di Antequera. Storiografia umanistica meridionale* (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 2001); Francesco Tateo, *I miti della storiografia umanistica* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1990); Gabriella Albanese, "A redescoberta dos historiadores antigos no Humanismo e o nascimento da historiografia moderna: Valla, Facio e Pontano na corte napolitana dos reis de Aragao," in *Atti del Convegno Internazionale Antigos e Modernos: diálogos sobre a (escrita da) história* (Universidade de São Paulo do Brasil, 2–7 settembre 2007), edited by Francisco Murari Pires (São Paulo: Alameda Casa Editorial, 2009), 277–329. See also Fulvio Delle Donne, Antonietta Iacono, eds., *Linguaggi e ideologie del Rinascimento monarchico aragonese (1442–1503). Forme della legittimazione e sistemi di governo* (Napoli: Federico II University Press, 2018). The editions of the main

ground their legitimacy. In particular, political theorisation was carried out in different literary forms (oratory, epistles, treatises) by humanists who in some cases were also active as historians of the kingdom, or, more generally, were very close to the Aragonese monarchs. Often, these men played official roles, including Bartolomeo Facio (who was the author of a triptych of political orations entitled *Super Isocrate*, composed in 1445, and was appointed as the historian of the kingdom by Alfonso I in 1446), Diomede Carafa (who was a collaborator of Ferdinando I and wrote the *Memoriali*, dated to 1476, among which his *Memoriali sui doveri del principe*, “On prince’s duties,” is the most significant in terms of princely theory), and Pontano and Maio, to whom this article is devoted and whose works are particularly relevant for the innovative theorising approach they share.⁹

In general, this output in Naples was mainly aimed at the consolidation of political unity within the state and the containment of internal dissent, and this process was directly linked with the development of a highly personalistic and centralised power. Indeed, the Aragonese sovereigns, firstly Alfonso and later his son Ferdinando (who ruled from 1458 to 1494), tried to concentrate sovereignty in their hands and to reduce the noblemen’s authority, limiting centrifugal forces in the kingdom and building a refined cultural programme that could go in this very direction with the help of intellectuals. Humanists, in particular, were committed to conceive and foster, in close collaboration with the monarchs, a model of princely power that was legitimized by the excellence of the prince himself: a superiority founded not just on his inner nature but also on his glorious deeds, often celebrated by writers and artists. From a broader perspective, such a political process was common in Italy in this age, when rulers (who often lacked conventional forms of legitimization, such as hereditary bonds) started to resort to the concept of virtue as the main source for their sovereignty. So, the authority of leaders was presented as based on their virtuous and superior essence. As a consequence of the princes’ excellence and exceptional qualities, the whole social body had to obey them, in a natural relationship between the rulers and their subjects. Thus, at the same time, the strategies deployed to build political consensus also became an essential element of political theorisation and a blossoming notion of realpolitik started to be introduced in this

historiographical texts are: Lorenzo Valla, *Gesta Ferdinandi regis Aragonum*, edited by Ottavio Besomi (Padova: Antenore, 1973); Bartolomeo Facio, *Rerum gestarum Alfonsi regis libri*, edited by Daniela Pietragalla (Alessandria: Edizioni dell’Orso, 2004); Antonii Panhormitae *Liber rerum gestarum Ferdinandi regis*, edited by Gianvito Resta (Palermo: Centro di studi filologici e linguistici siciliani, 1968); Giovanni Albino, *De gestis regum Neapolitanorum ab Aragonia qui extant libri quatuor* (Napoli: apud Iosephum Cacchium, 1589); Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, *De bello Neapolitano*, edited by Giuseppe Germano, Antonietta Iacono, Francesco Senatore (Firenze: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2019).

⁹ On Pontano and Maio, their activity alongside the king and their works, see the following sections of this article (and footnotes 6 and 7). Besides the aforementioned edition of Pontano’s *De principe*, the main editions of these texts are: Diomede Carafa, *Memoriali*, edited by Franca Petrucci Nardelli and Antonio Lupis (Roma: Bonacci editore, 1988); Maio, *De maiestate*; Gabriella Albanese, “L’esordio della trattatistica *de principe* alla corte aragonese: l’inedito *Super Isocrate* di Bartolomeo Facio,” in *Principi prima del Principe*, edited by Lorenzo Geri [*Studi (e Testi) Italiani* 29 (2012)], 59–115.

speculation. Pontano's and Maio's works are two emblematic cases that point to this gradual process. Their texts also reveal the crucial role that the performance of power progressively played in the political realm.

Pontano's and Maio's Treatises and the New Focus on Majesty

The analysis of these two mirrors for princes, read in conjunction, allows us to trace the evolution of this new approach toward political speculation in the Neapolitan context, from one of its first appearances in Pontano's *De principe*, where it still displays more implicit forms, to its later intensification in Maio's subsequent *De maiestate*, which is influenced by Pontano's thought and amplifies some of its innovative perspectives. Both treatises were composed by two distinguished literati who had an important part in Renaissance Neapolitan culture: they were both extremely eclectic humanists, involved in politics and very close to their ruler, and committed to the study of the classical tradition. However, Pontano is obviously a more prominent and renowned figure in Italian Humanism, as the leading intellectual in the cultural environment of the kingdom of Naples: a poet, historian, political and literary theorist, a diplomat and the secretary of the king, Ferdinando of Aragon.¹⁰ His political and ethical treatises—not only the *De principe*, but also his *De obedientia* (*On Obedience*) and his numerous texts on virtues, such as the *De prudentia* (*On Prudence*) and *De magnanimitate* (*On Magnanimity*)—were very influential in the cultural context of that time and were all composed between 1465 and 1503 (the year of Pontano's death).¹¹ The *De principe*, in particular, was almost certainly a model for Giuniano Maio's *De maiestate*. Compared to Pontano, Maio is a less well-known author, although he was also very close to the king. He served as the personal tutor of the sovereign's children, professor of rhetoric in the *Studio* in Naples, and author of one of the most important lexicographical works in the fifteenth century (the *De priscorum proprietate verborum*, published in 1475).¹²

The connection between Pontano's and Maio's works appears clearly in the

¹⁰ See Bentley, *Politics and Culture*, 184–252; Mario Santoro, “La cultura umanistica,” in *Storia di Napoli*, vol. 4, 2, dir. Ernesto Pontieri (Napoli: Società Editrice Storia di Napoli, 1974), 317–446. For Pontano's biography see Erasmo Percopo, *Vita di Giovanni Pontano*, edited by Michele Manfredi (Napoli: ITEA, 1938), and now Bruno Figliuolo, “Giovanni Pontano,” in DBI, vol. 84 (2015), 729–740. On the role of royal secretary: Giuliana Vitale, “Sul segretario regio al servizio degli Aragonesi di Napoli,” *Studi storici* 49, 2 (2008), 293–321: 294–299, 307–308.

¹¹ On Pontano's ethical treatises see in particular Roick, *Pontano's virtues*; Francesco Tateo, *Umanesimo etico di Giovanni Pontano* (Lecce: Milella, 1972). On the *De obedientia*: Guido Cappelli, “Prolegomeni al *De obedientia* di Pontano. Saggio interpretativo,” *Rinascimento meridionale* 1 (2010), 47–70; Guido Cappelli, “Umanesimo politico. La monarchia organicista nel IV libro nel *De obedientia* di Giovanni Pontano,” *California Italian Studies* 3/1 (2012), 1–20; Guido Cappelli, “Il castigo del Re. Bartolo, Pontano e il problema della disubbidienza,” *Studi Umanistici Piceni* 34 (2014), 91–104; Claudio Finzi, *Re, baroni, popolo: La politica di Giovanni Pontano* (Rimini: Il Cerchio Iniziative Editoriali, 2004), 39–94. The edition of the text is *Ioannis Ioviani Pontani ad Robertum Sanseverinum principem salernitanum in libros obedientiae probemium incipit feliciter* (Neapoli: Per Mathiam Moravum, 1490).

¹² On this work see Roberto Ricciardi, “Angelo Poliziano, Giuniano Maio, Antonio Calcillo,” *Rinascimento* 8 (1968), 277–309; Milena Montanile, *Le parole e la norma. Studi su lessico e grammatica a Napoli tra Quattro e Cinquecento* (Napoli: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1996), 22–31.

groundbreaking role that both assign to the concept of majesty: one of the central pillars around which the two treatises rotate. Indeed, they prove to be the first Italian mirrors for princes where the notion of *maiestas* is systematically theorized and dealt with, and, most remarkably, it is directly linked with the practical aspects of performing power. My analysis, concentrating on this aspect, aims to provide a better understanding on the new theory of kingship put forward in these texts, and on how this speculation acquires a pragmatic character, functional to support the model of princely state that was being fostered in the Neapolitan kingdom. This is the prototype of a harmonious, organic, and highly hierarchical political system, based on a personalistic rule and on the management of consensus: a programme that the Aragonese monarchs themselves pursued by seeking to establish a more centralized government and control subversive thrusts.¹³ Such an ideal, and at the same time practical, political model was framed by Pontano and later by Maio, not just defining the virtuous essence of the ruler in purely ethical terms, but also considering the external image of the prince and describing the idealized, and also concrete, profile that the leader has to present to his subjects.

The two Neapolitan texts can be placed in the long trajectory of evolution of mirrors for princes, and more generally of political treatises, which dates back to the classical and medieval age, with works by Isocrates (in particular the oration *To Nicocles*), Seneca (with the *De clementia*), Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome (with the *De regno* and *De regimine principum* respectively), just to mention some of the most influential models.¹⁴ Pontano's and Maio's texts, similar to most humanist *specula principum*, prove to be anchored especially in the classical tradition, displaying countless references to ancient sources, from Aristotle to Cicero, from Xenophon to Seneca. In general, these mirrors for princes follow more closely in the footsteps of the classical predecessors in terms of structure and analysis of virtues, and in the choice of a specific dedicatee, usually the ruler of a state, or the heir to the throne. The treatises by Pontano and Maio also adhere to this prototype, but with some specificities: the *De principe* is written as a letter addressed to Ferdinando of Aragon's heir, Alfonso; while the *De maiestate* is devoted to king Ferdinando himself. So, the didactic and pedagogical elements appear as

¹³ On this political model, see in particular Guido Cappelli, "Lo stato umanistico. Genesi dello stato moderno nella cultura italiana del XV secolo," in *La determinación de la humanitas del hombre en la Crítica del Juicio y en el humanismo clásico*, edited by Guillermo Villaverde López and Sara Barquiner del Toro Sara (Madrid: Escolar y Mayo Editores S. L., 2018), 35.70; Cappelli, *Maiestas*, 139–145. On the Aragonese politics in the kingdom of Naples see Giuseppe Galasso, "Il Regno di Napoli. Il Mezzogiorno angioino e aragonese (1266–1494)," in *Storia d'Italia*, directed by Giuseppe Galasso (Torino: UTET, 1992), vol. 15, 1; and more specifically on both political and ideological aspects, Delle Donne-Iacono, eds., *Linguaggi e ideologie*; Francesco Storti, *El buen marinero: psicología política e ideología monárquica al tiempo de Ferdinando I d'Aragona re di Napoli* (Roma: Viella, 2014).

¹⁴ On the tradition of mirrors for princes see footnote 2. On the recovery of Isocrates's work by humanists see Lucia Gualdo Rosa, *La fede nella "Paideia": aspetti della fortuna europea di Isocrate nei secoli XV e XVI* (Roma: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1984), and Albanese, "L'esordio della trattatistica". For the source of Seneca see Stacey, *Roman Monarchy*. On medieval political theory the most fundamental study is still the classic volume Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

fundamental in these texts, but a eulogistic component also becomes a key ingredient.

From these points of view, Pontano's and Maio's works have several traits in common and can be seen as marking a continuity. However, they are also characterized by distinctive features that go beyond different dedicatees and the dissimilar role of the addressee in the texts (a figure that is definitely more present in the *De maiestate*). The choice of language, Latin and vernacular respectively,¹⁵ and the more systematic use of contemporary history in Maio's political speculation are important characteristics. In light of these mutual, but also distinguishing traits, it is essential to study both texts in a comparative analysis. This investigation can reveal their similarities and differences, and allows us to fully understand the contribution made by these works to the evolution of princely political thought in late fifteenth-century Italy and to the gradual rise of a form of political realism, specific to this period and context. In particular, Pontano's work displays a more traditional structure typical of political-philosophical treatises, while in Maio's *De maiestate* the reference to the actual historical scenario, though already present in the *De principe*, becomes more evident and continuous. This approach especially comes to light in the regular and systematic employment in all chapters of *exempla* drawn from the contemporary history of the kingdom of Naples. Indeed, it is the dedicatee of Maio's work, King Ferdinando, who is portrayed in the text as the tangible example of the ideal *princeps* in all his actions. It is true that this explicit attention to the practical dimension of power is already perceivable in the *De principe*, where the author often recalls the Aragonese rulers with an exemplary function and, most importantly, devotes the whole of the second part of the treatise to the illustration of the prince's concrete behaviours that build his royal profile. However, this approach is even enhanced in the *De maiestate*, where all chapters are completed by the exemplification of how each virtue is performed by the actual sovereign. Thus, both Pontano and Maio, to different extents, portray an idealized profile of the perfect prince that has many traits in common with the real ruler, or with contemporary leaders celebrated as examples of ideal conduct, and, in doing so, they legitimize these leaders who are the protagonists of the existing historical scene. From this standpoint, these texts prove to be based on the interplay between, on the one hand, the ideal dimension and, on the other hand, the practical contemporary world and the actual historical reality.

Pontano's *De principe: Maiestas* and Consensus

Pontano's *De principe* can be considered as the first organic humanist work on the definition of the perfect prince, as the title demonstrates. It was composed in 1465, after the long war between the Aragonese monarch, Ferdinando, and the rebel barons in the Neapolitan kingdom, who supported the French pretender to throne Jean d'Anjou. The conflict lasted from 1459 to 1465 and revealed the importance of the burning issues of rebellion and dissent

¹⁵ On the use of the vernacular in Maio's work, see: Nicola De Blasi and Alberto Varvaro, "Napoli e l'Italia meridionale," in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. A. Asor Rosa (Torino: Einaudi, 1988), 2:256–257; and now Celati, "Classical Sources."

for the maintenance of power and unity in the state.¹⁶ Pontano's treatise is particularly innovative because the author, after delineating all virtues that already had a key position in the classical tradition (justice, clemency, fortitude and others) devotes almost the whole second half of the text to the illustration of the virtue of *maiestas*, which becomes the cornerstone of Pontano's political theory.¹⁷ However, it is striking that the text does not present a consistent theoretical definition of this notion, but instead includes a practical description of what majesty is by locating it within the king's real actions. Indeed, majesty turns out to be very difficult to define in theoretical terms. Paradoxically, it is an extremely abstract concept, probably the most abstract political virtue, since it corresponds to the essence of monarchic power, and, at the same time, according to Pontano's views, it is also extremely concrete, since it is the attribute that must characterise the whole behaviour of the prince and appears clearly only in the ruler's acts. Consequently, it can be defined only by illustrating the king's actual behaviour. It is significant that the description of majesty opens with Pontano addressing directly his interlocutor, the king's son Alfonso (a recurring element in the text), tracing an implicit connection between the idealized and realistic dimensions:

The virtue which will most enhance your reputation, both with your own subjects and with other men, is nowadays called majesty ... Majesty is the characteristic quality of princes. It has its origin in nature and is cultivated through practice and great diligence. First of all, therefore, it is needful for you to have self-knowledge and to understand that you are to conduct yourself as befits a prince. Having grasped that point, you will be sober and consistent in all your words and deeds.¹⁸

Here the humanist provides the general definition of majesty as the "characteristic quality of princes" but he immediately claims that its real essence, its origin and its nature become truly manifest through its practice, which requires careful assiduousness. Thus, after the overall more theoretical introduction, he starts at once to illustrate all concrete behaviours, actions, and even gestures that the monarch has to perform to "be" an authentic prince, as majesty is

¹⁶ For the history of this conflict and more generally of the kingdom of Naples under the Aragonese rule see Emilio Nunziante, "I primi anni di Ferdinando d'Aragona e l'invasione di Giovanni d'Angiò," *Archivio storico per le province napoletane* 17 (1892) – 23 (1898); Francesco Senatore, Francesco Storti, *Spazi e tempi della guerra nel Mezzogiorno aragonese. L'itinerario militare di re Ferrante, 1458–1465* (Salerno: CAR, 2002); Ernesto Pontieri, *Per la storia del regno di Ferrante I d'Aragona re di Napoli* (Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1968); and Galasso, "Il Regno di Napoli".

¹⁷ On the virtues analysed in Pontano's treatise see Cappelli, "Introduzione," XI–LX.

¹⁸ All passages of the text are quoted from: Pontano, *De principe* (this passage at 54–56, § 46: "Maxime autem opinionem tum subiectorum tum coeterorum hominum conciliabit ea quae nunc a quibusdam etiam non indoctis viris, quanvis parum proprie, maiestas vocatur. [...] Est autem ea principum propria comparaturque arte et diligentia multa habetque ortum a natura. Primum igitur oportet teipsum ut cognoscas intelligasque te gerere principis personam: quod intelligens, in omnibus tum dictis tum factis gravitatem servabis atque constantiam.") All translations are quoted (with changes, if necessary), from *Cambridge Translations*, 2:78.

the defining trait of princely power and it is the indispensable requirement to maintain this same power. The reference to the ruler's "self-knowledge" and to his "conduct as a prince" underscores the inextricable link between essence and behaviour, immaterial notions and concrete performance. Thus Pontano frames his lengthy illustration of the practical aspects of majesty by describing meticulously how the ideal sovereign has to speak, to look, to dress, and even to disguise his thoughts. In particular, in a telling passage, Pontano prescribes how the ruler should take counsel, portraying with impressive thoroughness the attitude he should have, his appearance, the exterior image that he ought to display to his interlocutors, and the slightest particulars and effects produced by his body language:

Since all planning and all action involve taking advice, both in public and private affairs, you should, when taking counsel, listen to many points of view and consider even more, determining the grounds on which each individual case is based. You should neither agree immediately nor always reject matters out of hand, expressing a great deal by means of glance and a nod, wearing a pensive aspect when weighing up many matters and scrutinizing the opinions of others in such a way that you appear to want to look inside the minds of those who are speaking. You should not reveal your own thoughts at once, or only to a few, and you should be cautious and to the point in speaking.¹⁹

At the end of this passage, the humanist even suggests that the king should conceal his real views and, therefore, adopt a watchful approach in his relationship with his subjects, in particular his advisers. So Pontano here places at the foreground of his political theorisation the strategy of dissimulation, which is unprecedentedly seen as a useful practice that distinguishes a skilful ruler. This point, along with the extensive consideration devoted to the minimal details of the sovereign's performance in public, instils a specific form of realism in the treatise's ideological perspective and it also betrays a sharp attention to the actual historical circumstances in which the sovereign, in particular the king of Naples, had to act. Indeed, especially in the delicate relationships between Ferdinando and the traitorous barons, the policies that he carried out reveal (at a close analysis) similar realistic tendencies, especially in the king's ability to simulate and dissimulate his thoughts and intentions. This is a point that Pontano also made in a number of passages of his *De bello Neapolitano*, his historical account of the conflict between Ferdinando and the rebel barons who were allied with French troops.²⁰

¹⁹ Pontano, *De principe*, 56 (§ 47): "Cumque omnis tum consultatio tum actio sit de consiliis capiendis, aut de rebus publicis aut privatis, in capiendis consiliis oportet multa audire, plurima circumspicere, causas singulorum quae dicuntur exquirere, non statim assentiri nec semper etiam palam improbare, oculis nutuque multa declarare, multa etiam pensitantem animo vultu praeteferre; sententias aliorum ita examinare ut mentes dicentium videre vel introspicere; quod ipse sentias aut non statim aut solum paucis aperire; in dicendo cautum et brevem esse, pro rerum tamen qualitate." *Cambridge Translations*, 78.

²⁰ On Ferdinando's politics and the ideology manifested in his rule see in particular Storti, *El buen marinero*. The *De bello Neapolitano* is published now in the edition mentioned at footnote n. 8. On this historiographical work see

After focusing on the king's conduct in taking advice, the *De principe* continues with a similarly detailed description of how the *princeps* has to act in the specific occasions of meetings with diplomats and emissaries from other territories. Again, Pontano frames a meticulous depiction of the behaviours that the king should maintain, considering also the impression that he has to be able to elicit in his interlocutors:

Public affairs ... are dealt with by means of another skill. Show yourself to be kind and affable with those ambassadors from towns who seek audience with you; listen to them presenting their petitions with attentive expression, thereby giving them the confidence to speak. When you dismiss them, do so in such a way that they understand that they will readily obtain those things which are honourable and just from you.²¹

In dealing with the relationship between the king and diplomats, Pontano even contemplates the specific case in which the prince needs to refuse a request and explains how this has to be done. Once more, the accent is placed on the effect that the sovereign has to produce in the ambassadors, with particular attention to his facial expressions and way of speaking:

However, if they have sought things which are lacking in honour of fairness, you should not always refuse them, either openly or by wearing a pained expression or speaking harsh words. Instead it is to be made clear to them that you are not prepared to grant their requests, not because you yourself are unwilling, but because you judge them to be disadvantageous for the petitioners and that, therefore, it is in their own best interests for these requests to be denied.²²

But the most pivotal section in Pontano's practical explanation of what majesty is appears in the definition of the prince's behaviour with his subjects. Here the link between the performance of power and the achievement of consensus and social harmony comes to light in

Liliana Monti Sabia, *Pontano e la storia. Dal "De bello Neapolitano" all "Actius"* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1995); Ferraù, *Il tessitore*, 81–129; Francesco Senatore, "Pontano storico," *Studi storici* 39, 1 (1998), 291–296; Francesco Senatore, "Pontano e la guerra di Napoli," in *Condottieri e uomini d'arme nell'Italia del Rinascimento*, edited by Mario Del Treppo (Napoli: GISEM-Liguori, 2001), 279–309; and Marta Celati, *Conspiracy Literature in Early Renaissance Italy: Historiography and Princely Ideology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 113–156: on Ferdinando's tendency to simulate, see 145–146.

²¹ Pontano, *De principe*, 56–58 (§ 48): "Publicae vero res ... arte alia tractandae sunt. Urbium legis conspectum tuum adeuntibus mansuetum te et facilem praebeas; mandata referentes eo vultu audies ut fiduciam eis ad dicendum des. Cum vero dimittentur, ita eos dimittes ut qui honesta et iusta facile abs te impetrari posse intelligant." *Cambridge Translations*, 78–79.

²² Pontano, *De principe*, 58 (§ 48): "Quae vero aut minus honesta aut non satis aequa petierint, ea non semper nec palam nec tristiore vultu aut gravioribus verbis deneganda sunt, sed potius ostendendum est non ideo ea te non concedere quod nolis, sed quod illis inutilia iudices quodque ea ratione ipsorum rebus melius consulatur." *Cambridge Translations*, 79.

its most evident manifestation, as the humanist defines the ruler as a *pater patriae*, who behaves similarly to a father with his sons:

Behave towards your citizens in such a way that they regard your presence like that of a head of a family among his dependents, a magistrate passing sentence, an arbitrator in civil disturbances and disagreements – rejoicing in their success and prosperity, grieving over their difficulties and resisting dangers and violence with all your might. Eventually, whether you are absent or present, they will understand that you have concern for their affairs, so that they fear you as their lord and revere you as their patron.²³

The reference to the figure of the “head of the family” amplifies the theorization of an organic and hierarchical model of the state, whose structure and functioning are similar to that of the smallest cell of human society, that is the household, or of a living organism. Such principles are inspired by the traditional notion of body politics, which has a very long tradition and was central already in classical political thought, for example in Aristotle’s *Politics*, and was placed at the foundations of Pontano’s monarchical theory. Here, the most specific allusion is to Seneca’s *De clementia* (1, 14, 2) where an equation is established between the *pater familias* and the *pater patriae*.²⁴ However, the humanist goes further and ends this passage by emphasizing, once more, the visible component of the prince’s conduct towards his subjects, mentioning openly the perception they can get of him, of his decisions, thoughts, and responses to them:

Let them, however, perceive you to be stern in your judgements, sober and cautious in your replies, agreeable in conversation, acute in thought, but not at all argumentative. Your words should be neither superfluous, nor lacking in dignity or responsibility.²⁵

In the last sentence, Pontano culminates his discourse by stressing that the monarch’s image is directly associated with the ideas of dignity and responsibility, implicitly evoking that his actions and words are not spontaneous but studied and led by self-restraint. Thus the

²³ Pontano, *De principe*, 60 (§ 50): “Praesens eum te erga cives geres ut necessitatibus suis paterfamilias, iuridicendo praetorem, civilibus simultatibus dissensionibusque compositorem adesse sentiant; gaudentem suis secundis ac florentibus rebus, dolentem adversis ac totis viribus pericula vimque propulsantem; demumque et absentem et praesentem, eam te rerum suarum habere curam intelligant, ut tanquam dominum vereantur, colant ut patronum.” *Cambridge Translations*, 79.

²⁴ For this reference see Cappelli’s commentary on this specific passage in Pontano, *De principe*, p. 60 (§ 50). On body politics in Medieval and Renaissance ideologies see Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, chapter 5; John M. Najemy, “The Republic’s Two Bodies: Body Metaphors in Italian Renaissance Political Thought,” in *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 237–262; Guido Cappelli, “*Corpus est res publica*. La struttura della comunità secondo l’umanesimo politico,” *Studi (e Testi) Italiani* 29 (2012): 117–131; Cappelli, “Lo stato umanistico.”

²⁵ Pontano, *De principe*, 60–62 (§ 51): “In iudiciis autem severum, in responsis gravem et circumspectum sentiant; gratum in sermone, acrem in sententiis, minime tamen contentiosum. Sint verba ut sine supercilio sic non absque gravitate et penso.” *Cambridge Translations*, 79.

governing role, in all its prerogatives, is seen as subject to self-discipline, and, consequently, the perfect *princeps* ends up being portrayed as somehow superior to the social community he rules since, thanks to his virtues, he is able to perform this faultless and carefully thought-out behaviour.

More generally, Pontano's whole description of what majesty is in its everyday aspects reveals that he puts the stress on the "exterior" image that the leader is able to convey. Thus, in his theorisation of statecraft, the prince's power does not lie only in his virtues but also in the appearance of his virtues and in what people perceive about him. This is the main element that allows the king to gain consensus, which is now the cornerstone of the political system. The centrality of the notion of consensus becomes evident in two passages of Pontano's text, where, in his discussion of majesty, he significantly mentions the ideas of admiration, awe, and reverence:

By following these precepts and others which nature, age, time, circumstances and practice will teach you, and on which no clear guidelines can be imparted, a certain feeling of awe towards you will come into being, without which there can be no majesty.²⁶

By these and similar means, you will procure for yourself love and reverence, the faithful and daily companions of majesty, even though the poets think that majesty is born out of reverence and honour.²⁷

In the second passage, the reference is to the main classical source where Pontano could find an explicit definition of majesty: Ovid's *Fasti* (V, 23), where this virtue is seen from a mythological perspective and is described as the daughter of Honour and Reverence. But, besides the allusion to the classical tradition that ennobles the political discourse, what emerges clearly in these sections is that, in Pontano's view, majesty corresponds to the distinctive quality of kings and includes all strategies deployed to gain the people's consent: in particular all techniques adopted by the prince to display an effective royal image that is able to stir a feeling of admiration and reverence in the people.

However, it is important to highlight that, although Pontano seems to distance himself from the purely ethically centred view that has been considered by scholars as the defining trait of humanist political thought, his focus on the exhibition of virtues reveals a more complex perspective. Such a focus does not imply that the ruler can simply and only simulate (and, in

²⁶ Pontano, *De principe*, 56 (§ 47): "Ex his igitur atque aliis quae natura, tempus, res et ars docuerit, de quibus nulla certa praecepta tradi possent, nascetur admiratio quaedam, sine qua maiestas esse nullo modo potest"; *Cambridge Translations*, 78.

²⁷ Pontano, *De principe*, 62 (§ 51): "His atque similibus amor conciliabitur et reverentia, fideles et diuturni maiestatis comites, quanquam poetae ex Honore et Reverentia natam eam velint"; *Cambridge Translations*, 79.

fact, the precise function of simulation is still left somehow implied), but, rather, this means that the prince has to be able to display the qualities he really possesses and that his skilful exhibition is now seen as vital as the actual essence of his nature. Indeed, the prince still has to be authentically virtuous in theory, but what is becoming more and more crucial is how he is able to show his worthy behaviour, in order to obtain the people's respect. Thus if we look at Pontano's political thought and we place it in the trajectory of evolution of political ideologies, it turns out to be not merely based on pure ethical tenets; conversely, while it relies extensively on traditional principles, it ends up going partially beyond them and already anticipates concepts that would develop in the more realistic political philosophy of the following centuries and that now are the reflection of the political world of this specific age and context.

Maio's *De maiestate*: The Ruler's Action between Praise and Political Theory

Giuniano Maio's *De maiestate* follows in the footsteps of Pontano's political theorisation by enhancing this new approach in the definition of the concept of majesty. Maio's treatise was written in Naples in 1492, almost 30 years after the *De principe*, and is very much indebted to it, although it expands even more extensively the perspective of the previous text. Maio's work occupies an important position in an ideal history of political thought in the Italian Renaissance, but it has been almost completely overlooked by scholarship so far. It is one of the first pre-Machiavellian mirrors for princes written in the vernacular; moreover, it displays a particularly effective synergy between theoretical elements and historical perspectives, since the ideal prince described in the text is embodied in the figure of Ferdinando of Aragon, the dedicatee of this work.²⁸ So, the illustration of the princely virtues is achieved by means of the narration of key historical events of the Neapolitan kingdom, in particular the famous "conspiracy of the barons": the rebellion of the noblemen against the king that started in 1459 and resulted in a war that ended in 1465, but after twenty years it broke out again between 1485 and 1487 (the former conflict, which was also known as "first conspiracy of the barons" in order to distinguish it from the following insubordination of around 20 years later, is now identified in scholarship as "war of succession").²⁹ These two seditions marked an extremely turbulent phase of the history of the kingdom and put the issue of subversion in the foreground of the political debate. Such a topic becomes pivotal also in the *De maiestate*, where extensive attention is paid to the concrete political actions of the ruler, King Ferdinando, and to the ways in which he suppressed the barons' rebellion. But probably the most striking feature of Maio's work is that it also involved the artistic dimension. Indeed the historical episodes and the ruler's virtues are not just presented in the text, but also in twenty-six illuminations in the most important manuscript of the work still extant, a very precious codex

²⁸ On these aspects of this work see Celati, "Classical Sources"; Celati, "Teoria politica."

²⁹ On the rebellion of the barons between 1485–1487, see: Elisabetta Scarton, "La congiura dei baroni del 1485–87 e la sorte dei ribelli," in *Poteri, relazioni, guerra nel Regno di Ferrante d'Aragona*, ed. Francesco Senatore and Francesco Storti (Napoli: ClioPress, 2011), 213–290.

in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (ms. Italien, 1711) that was commissioned by the king himself to be part of the royal library: it was put together between 1492 and 1493 and was decorated by Nardo Rapicano, a distinguished illuminator of the Aragonese court.³⁰

One of the main innovative aspects of Maio's treatise appears in the title itself, *De maiestate*: here the concept of princely rule is neither explicitly mentioned, nor represented in the reference to the ruler (like in the *De principe* and other texts). Instead, the figure of the ideal prince and the concept of the perfect art of governing are encapsulated in the most important princely virtue, *maiestas*. This is seen as an all-embracing virtue and is discussed in the treatise by illustrating all its components (other sub-virtues). Majesty was already highlighted in Pontano's *De principe*, but the accent placed by Maio on it reveals a more developed notion of realpolitik and the centrality of the art of performing power in political theorisation. Now the whole focus is claimed to be shifted to the "practice" of politics and to the ruler's displaying of concrete actions. Maio openly emphasizes this new outlook in his prologue:

Experience is more useful and more certain, since it improves through continuous practice ... If it is true that theory is good in explaining by words, practice is much better in doing: theory teaches and finds glory in its doctrine, while practice puts things into action and you can enjoy its fruit ... theory opens the door and shows the way, practice opens the way where there is not even the sign of the path, it builds the door and the way by itself.³¹

The preeminence assigned to practice over theory emerges plainly in the lively metaphoric description of the role of the two entities: the personification of "theory" teaches how to act and shows us the path, while "practice" is portrayed as it physically builds the way and the door which men have to go through in their actions.

³⁰ On this manuscript see Tammaro De Marinis, *La Biblioteca napoletana dei re d'Aragona* (Milano: Hoepli, 1947–1952): 1:41, 50, 174; 2:103–104, 193, 301–302, 306 (documents n. 850, 859, 864, 915); *Supplemento*, 2, 20–21; Gennaro Toscano, "A la gloire de Ferdinand d'Aragon, roi de Naples, le *De maiestate* de Iuniano Maio enluminé par Nardo Rapicano," in *L'illustration. Essais d'iconographie*, Études réunies par Maria Teresa Caracciolo et Ségolène Le Men. Actes du Séminaire CNRS, Parigi, 1993–1994 (Parigi: Klincksieck, 1999), 125–139. On the illuminations (which were originally 30, but only 26 are still extant, because of the loss of folios 58–59 in the manuscript), see: Celati, "Teoria politica"; and Barreto, *La majesté*, 230–249. On Nardo Rapicano, see Gennaro Toscano, "La bottega di Cola e Nardo Rapicano," in *La biblioteca reale di Napoli al tempo della dinastia aragonese*, edited by Gennaro Toscano (Valencia: Generalitat Valenciana, 1998), 393–415.

³¹ Maio, *De maiestate*, 1 (my translation): "Più utile e più certa cosa è la esperienza che per continuata pratica se affina ... Imperò che la scienza sape bene dire, la pratica sape molto migliore fare: quella insegna e di sua dottrina se gloria, questa adopera e del suo frutto godi, ... quella apre la porta e mostra la via, questa apersi dove de via."



Figure 1: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. Italien, 1711, fol. 8r. Illumination by Nardo Rapicano (1493).

But, after this programmatic statement in the treatise's introduction, Maio's attention to the performance of power becomes manifest in the description and celebration of the king's virtues: all attributes that create the overarching virtue of majesty and that are exemplified in Ferdinando's conduct. This innovative viewpoint appears not only in the text but even more vividly in the visual portrayals in the manuscript. It is significant that many of illuminations deal with events or issues related to the rebellion of the barons and rotate around the burning problem of internal political conflict, representing the king's response to it. For example, the first illumination depicts Ferdinando's reaction to the attack that was carried out against him in May 1460 in Teano by the leader of the seditious noblemen, Marino Marzano, Duke of Sessa (Figure 1).³² Marzano, who was one of the most powerful noblemen in the kingdom and Ferdinando's brother-in-law (married to his sister Eleonora d'Aragona), tried to kill the king in an ambush, with the help of two other barons, Deifobo Dell'Anguillara and Iacopuccio da Montagano. But Ferdinando managed to save himself and put the attackers to flight. This attack can be regarded as the first most apparent manifestation of the barons' subversive

³² Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. Italien, 1711, fol. 8r. On Marino Marzano, see: Patrizia Sardina, "Marino Marzano," *DBI*, 71 (2008):446–450.

intentions and, after this event, the war continued for several years. However, despite its negative significance, this episode was mythologized by official Neapolitan culture and was endowed with symbolic meanings that could effectively support the Aragonese propaganda. On the one hand, it encapsulated the idea of the most dangerous attempt to murder the sovereign, a crime to be unanimously condemned; on the other hand, it became a symbol of the prince's fortitude and strength, essential princely attributes that build (together with others) the virtue of majesty and that Ferdinando was able to put into action at the right moment in order to save himself and, consequently, the whole state. As for artistic celebration, the ambush in Teano is represented not just in the illumination by Nardo Rapicano but also in the bas-reliefs on the bronze gate in Castel Nuovo in Naples, which was commissioned by king Ferdinando himself from the artist Guglielmo Monaco around 1475. This artwork is further evidence of the importance that was ascribed to this incident in the Aragonese cultural politics.³³ Maio himself contributed towards turning this episode into a positive *exemplum* of fortitude and immortalizing it. Indeed, in the treatise the virtue of fortitude mainly corresponds to the capacity to endure misfortune and react bravely to it, and is openly recognised as a fundamental component of majesty, as the humanist clearly claims: "this magnanimous Majesty should never fall back, nor turn his back to the enemies, conversely, he has to stay intrepid, fearless and with an unbeaten spirit."³⁴

Significantly, in the codex of the *De maiestate* all the king's virtues are symbolized in several illuminations that either provide an allegorical depiction of these qualities or, in most cases, portray specific historical episodes and intensify, through the visual channel, the literary representation in the text. Thus these pictures condense the eulogistic image of the different princely attributes that, as complementary tesserae, create majesty; but the most effective depiction of such virtues often appears in their exemplification in concrete actions, which become the defining elements of *maiestas* as the actualization of the royal essence. Besides, in this political theorization of majesty, a key role is also played by the representation of the relationship between the prince and the subjects. An emblematic example is provided by the second illumination in the codex, again parallel to the literary description in the text. This is the image that opens chapter II and is somehow correlated to the previous picture of the attack in Teano. Indeed the second illumination portrays again the king while, in 1463, forgives the traitorous baron Marzano (although, after a further betrayal, Ferdinando decided to harshly punish him). This image encapsulates the representation of both the princely virtue of clemency, another constituent of majesty, and the repentance of the rebel, who is portrayed on his knees as he receives the king's forgiveness (Figure 2).³⁵ Such illumination emphasizes the hierarchical and verticalized relationship between the head of the state and the barons, who

³³ See: Alan Ryder, "Ferdinando I d'Aragona," *DBI*, vol. 46 (1996):182.

³⁴ Maio, *De maiestate*, 26: "a questa magnanima Maiestà se ricerca mai farese indietro né mai voltare le spalle a l'inimico, ma con animo invitto e da ogni timore nudo stare intrepido."

³⁵ BnF, ms. Italien, 1711, fol. 10v.

have to accept the monarch's superior power and are epitomized, as a social category, in the figure of Marzano. Thus the exemplary function played by the representation of actual historical events and actions performed by the prince, both in the text and images, is not limited to the depiction of the ruler's edifying behaviour, often immortalized and celebrated in its practical expressions, but it also includes the opposite pole of the negative exemplars: the images of the forces that oppose central authority and that the prince succeeds in suppressing. The eternalizing narrative of the final defeat of the king's enemies appears in another colourful illumination in the manuscript: the image of the battle of Troia, the victory that sanctioned the success of the Aragonese troops over the rebels and the French army in 1462.³⁶ This event, again, was often represented in literary and artistic works in those years in Naples and ended up conveying the idea of the prince's final win and his military valour (for example, it was chosen as the subject of Porcelio de' Pandoni's poem *De proelio apud Troiam* and it also was represented in the aforementioned bas-reliefs on the bronze gate in Castel Nuovo).³⁷



Figure 2: Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ms. Italien, 1711, fol. 10v. Illumination by Nardo Rapicano (1493).

³⁶ BnF, ms. Italien, 1711, fol. 14r.

³⁷ See: Antonietta Iacono, *Porcelio de' Pandoni: l'umanista e i suoi mecenati: momenti di storia e di poesia: con un'appendice di testi* (Napoli: Paolo Loffredo, 2017); and Tateo, *I miti*, 239–240, 223–256.

However, some of the most vivid visual representations in the codex are those that provide the lively illustration of the ruler's ability in fighting his opponents with a specific accent on the concept of punishment. This is the punishment inflicted by the king on his enemies, who are regarded as the enemies of the whole state: thus this image condenses in itself the notion of justice and the effective response given by the prince to all criminal and disintegrating tendencies in the kingdom, which is seen as embodied in its head. The most powerful representation of this violent revenge probably appears in chapter XVII in two images that can be considered a pair: in the first picture, a baron has had his tongue cut out, while in the second parallel illumination a baron has just had his hand cut off, with blood still on his arm and, in the background the instrument of execution.³⁸ What is most noteworthy is that, once again, the strength and predominance of princely power is conveyed through the depiction of its concrete demonstration in palpable and physical actions (although partially symbolic in these illuminations). Here the prince is not even part of the images, since what is most relevant is the outcome of his acts; however, he is still the hidden protagonist as his policies are figuratively recalled by evoking their outcome, which is the brutal mutilation of the body of state's enemies as a just form of punishment.

Conclusions

The literary and artistic examples analysed in this article (in the latter case provided by sophisticated artworks in the manuscript of Maio's work) reveals the centrality that the art of performing power acquired in late fifteenth-century political thought in Italy, especially in the kingdom of Naples. In the *De maiestate*, the focus on the notion of majesty, which coincides with the practical expression of kingship, results in the forceful representation of the prince's deeds and in particular of his reaction to rebellion and his ability to balance mercy and revenge, according to what actual circumstances require. The leader's success in defeating his opponents, even by means of violent reprisal when needed, is presented as the guarantee of the safety of the whole social body, in an ideal correspondence (inspired by principles of body politics) that links the sovereign's will and the good of the whole state and associates the figure of prince and the law, as Maio himself openly underlies in his work:

We can certainly say that the ruling prince is nothing but the law itself, animated with wise words, and law is nothing but the visual representation of the prince on mute paper.³⁹

From this perspective the performance of the prince's power, in all his actions, assumes a key

³⁸ BnF, ms. Italien, 1711, fols. 52r–52v.

³⁹ Maio, *De maiestate*, 204: “Con verità dire se può che 'l principe che rege non è altro che lege animata de lingua sagia e lege non è altro che principe figurato in carta muta.”

position in the theorisation of statecraft since it becomes the key to gain consensus. Pontano's *De principe* already started to show this point and later, following in his footsteps, Maio's work emphasized it even more radically: this appears in the structure itself of the *De maiestate*, which is extensively based on the illustration of the actualization of ruling virtues. Such a political model is not only prescribed by mirrors for princes but reflects the situation of most of fifteenth-century states (especially in the Neapolitan kingdom), where rulers have to face problems of legitimacy and insubordination. This is the very historical reality that treatises start to portray faithfully, revealing, under their idealizing surface, a more profound realistic political outlook. In particular, both Pontano's and Maio's works show that in the second half of the fifteenth century in Italy humanists' attention to princely virtues is taken to an extreme level and, at the same time, ends up going beyond merely ethically centred views, as it is marked by the emergence of a more flexible conception of the exercise of power. This transition can be seen as the expression of a broader process of evolution of political ideologies that would culminate in the following century, when a more mature and consistent notion of political realism would be defined, reflecting a new historical phase.⁴⁰ But these texts already provide an excellent case in point of cultural, historical, and political phenomena that affect different fields and find their most evident manifestation in literary and artistic sources, and, as in the case of Maio's work, in the interplay of both these channels, literature and art, through which political theorisation was often put forward in this age.

⁴⁰ See: Maurizio Viroli, *Dalla politica alla ragion di Stato: la scienza del governo tra XIII e XVII secolo* (Roma: Donzelli, 1994).