A picture perfect prince: Spanish emblems and Machiavelli’s Il principe

Barzetti, Joseph

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Abstract:
This thesis compares Spanish Golden Age emblems on the education of the prince to Machiavelli’s Il principe to determine how Spanish emblem writers position themselves with respect to Machiavelli’s ideas on the topic. Keith David Howard’s The Reception of Machiavelli in Early Modern Spain serves as the theoretical and methodological basis for this study. Howard identifies three categories that historians have used to classify Spanish authors and their positions towards Machiavelli’s ideas: those who reject Machiavelli’s ideas, those who accept them almost completely, and those who attempt to blend Machiavelli’s ideas with Christian values. Howard believes that the first two categories are oversimplifications that lead to a misunderstanding of the Spanish reception of the works by the Florentine author. This research project aims to determine whether Howard is correct in stating that the first two groups are oversimplifications and explores how Spanish emblem writers position themselves vis-à-vis Machiavellian ideas. Three case studies provide an analysis and comparison of emblems to Machiavelli’s Il principe. Machiavelli’s Discorsi offer further material for analysis and comparison.

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