



Andrea Cambini

Lausten, Pia Schwarz

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Andrea Cambini

DATE OF BIRTH 24 August 1445
 PLACE OF BIRTH Florence
 DATE OF DEATH 5 March 1527
 PLACE OF DEATH Florence

BIOGRAPHY

Andrea Cambini was an Italian historian, humanist and writer. He was a student of Cristoforo Landino, whose *Disputationes Camaldolenses* he translated into Italian, and he was an admirer of Marsilio Ficino, who put him in contact with the Accademia Platonica in Florence, and who inspired his translation of Cicero's philosophical dialogues, *De senectute*, dedicated to Lorenzo di Bernardo de' Medici, and *De amicitia*, dedicated to Antonio de' Medici.

Politically, Cambini was closely connected with the Medici family, in particular Lorenzo il Magnifico and Cardinal Giovanni Piccolomini. He worked as a diplomat for Il Magnifico and held administrative, political and military offices. Among other tasks, Lorenzo de' Medici sent him to the Este court in Ferrara in 1482-83. During his stay there, he was probably asked by the Este princes to translate Flavio Biondo's *Historiarum ab inclinatione Romanorum imperii decades* ('Decades of history from the decline of the Roman Empire') into Italian. This translation was probably completed in 1491 (for further details, see Guerrieri, 'Fra storia e letteratura', p. 394). Between 1485 and 1486, he was a prior in Florence, and afterwards he functioned as the official treasurer of Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, son of Lorenzo. In 1488, he became the administrator of the Abbey of Montecassino, and in the following years he administered all the other abbeys of Giovanni de' Medici.

He was loyal to Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici and protected him even physically during the riots in Florence against the Medicis, though when they were forced into exile in 1494 he broke his relationship with them. In the first years of the Florentine Republic, he actively supported Girolamo Savonarola and Francesco Valori, but during the insurrection against the party of the *piagnoni* on 8 April 1498 he was involved in the downfall of Savonarola. He was fined and sentenced to ten years in exile. Between these events and 1528, the year of his death (perhaps of plague; see

Guerrieri, 'Fra storia e letteratura', p. 409), he did not participate much in the political life of Florence, though, as E. Guerrieri has documented, he was not completely absent from the political scene ('Fra storia e letteratura', pp. 407-8). Apparently, he dedicated himself to the study of the Ottoman Empire, and composed the uncompleted *Della origine de' Turchi et imperio delli Ottomanni*. This was published posthumously in 1529 (the only one of his works that saw publication), the year in which the Ottomans attempted to capture Vienna. Cambini's treatise became very successful and was reissued several times between 1529 and 1541. It was published together with Paolo Giovio's *Commentarii delle cose de' Turchi, con gli fatti e la vita di Scanderbeg* in 1541, and Francesco Sansovino included parts of the text in his *Dell'istoria universale dell'origine et imperio de Turchi* (1560-61). Cambini also wrote another historical treatise, *Della progenie de' Re di Francia e della vita loro*.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

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 M. Ficino, *Opera*, Basel, 1576, pp. 650, 671, 743, 898
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Secondary

- E. Guerrieri, 'Fra storia e letteratura. Andrea di Antonio Cambini', *Medioevo e Rinascimento* 22 (2008) 375-420 (an important article that corrects some of the statements in Giansante's article in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, and refers to further studies on Cambini's genealogy)
 E. Cochrane, *Historians and historiography in the Italian Renaissance*, Chicago IL, 1981 (in n. 71, Cochrane incorrectly states that Cambini's book was not published in 1529 in Florence)
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WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Della origine de Turchi et imperio della casa ottomana, 'On the origin of the Turks and the rule of the Ottoman dynasty'

DATE 1529

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Italian

DESCRIPTION

Cambini's *Della origine de' Turchi* is a history of the Ottoman Empire consisting of four untitled 'books' (87 folios in the 1529 edition). The edition of 1529, which is quoted here, contains a dedicatory letter from the publisher Bernardo Giunta to Cambini's son, Girolamo, which is not included in any of the later editions. Giunta says that Cambini was an 'enemy of leisure', and that he left the work on the Turks unfinished at his death. He himself had encouraged Cambini to write this treatise, so that he could publish it for the 'common good', to make Christian leaders understand the Turkish threat and to stop their mutual squabbling and instead 'unite and take up just arms to fight the powerful enemy'. As Cambini did not dedicate his work to anybody, Giunta decided to dedicate it to Cambini's son. Cambini may have been spurred to write the work by the success of the Ottomans in Syria and Egypt (1516-17), though he may also have begun it as early as the end of the 15th century (see Guerrieri, 'Fra storia e letteratura', pp. 410-11, who refers to Gianluca Masi, 'Stefano il Grande e la Moldavia nei "Commentari" di Andrea Cambini e Theodoro Spandugino Cantacuzeno').

Cambini follows a chronological structure in his account of the history and deeds – rather than the origins – of the Ottoman sultans. The first book treats the Ottoman Empire from its foundation until Mehmed II's rise to power (c. 1300-1451), the second recounts the achievements of Mehmed II (1451-81), the third describes the events during the reign of Bayezid II (1481-1512), and the fourth deals with Selim I's reign (1512-20).

Cambini introduces the first book with the often debated question about the origin of the Turks. He rejects the thesis of their Trojan origin and claims instead that they are 'of a Barbarian and cruel nature, tracing their origin to the Scythian nation' (p. 2r). On the one hand, the Trojan origin of the Turks would explain their hatred of the Greeks (the Europeans), who had defeated the Trojans, but on the other it gave the Turks a noble origin, which Cambini could not accept. In line with most quattrocento humanists, such as Aeneas Silvio Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II), who 'spearheaded the campaign to eradicate the myth of the Turks' Trojan ancestry' (Bisaha, *Creating East and West*, p. 90), Cambini defended the Scythian thesis. This was also true of other 16th-century historians and humanists, such as Jean Lemaire de Belges and Erasmus, who denied the Trojan connection, favouring a 'barbaric' or 'nomadic'

origin (Bisaha, *Creating East and West*, p. 90). Indeed, the majority of the quattrocento humanists argued that 'the Turks were savage Scythians, a people with an ancient and barbarous pedigree. But even so, this was a narrative of origins rooted not so much in classical ethnography as in misinterpretations of medieval chronicles and the wilder fringes of Christian apocalyptic' (Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, p. 244). According to Meserve, the moralising points earlier historians drew from this narrative of origins and the story of the Ottomans' conquests are not as frequently raised in authors such as Cambini (*Empires of Islam*, p. 241). However, he does judge the Ottomans negatively, and thus he belongs to the same anti-Turkish 'family' as the quattrocento humanists.

His sources are also to be found among them: Cambini may have been inspired by his own translation (finished in 1491) of Flavio Biondo's *Historiarum ab inclinatione Romanorum imperii decades* ('Decades of history from the decline of the Roman Empire', written from 1439 to 1453, published in 1483). Other humanists also referred to this treatise by Biondo in their treatment of the Ottomans' origin from Scythia. Furthermore, in his initial enumeration of all the territories conquered, plundered and ruined by the Ottomans, Cambini refers explicitly to Nicolò Sagundino as one of his sources, 'a learned man both in the Greek and the Latin languages' (p. 2v). Sagundino's treatise *De origine et rebus gestis Turcarum* had been written in 1454-56 for Pius II, who also used it himself as his most important source on the Ottomans in his work on Europe (*Asiae Europaeque elegantissima descriptio*). Cambini also uses Pius II's work as a source. K. Petkov has demonstrated that Cambini directly follows Pius on the subject of the Orthodox faith of the Serbians when he speaks of John Hunyadi's distrust of the Serbian despot George Brankovich in the 1440s (Petkov, 'England and the Balkan Slavs', p. 107 nn. 48 and 51): In Piccolomini's *Elegantissima descriptio*, it is said that the Brankovich 'did not keep either to the way of the Roman Church, or to the law of Mohamed' ('England and the Balkan Slavs', p. 107 n. 48). In Cambini, it is said that Hunyadi keeps parts of the conquered territories for himself because 'he could not trust the Despot since he was a man who did not account more for the Christian religion than for the Muslim one, and since he was located between the Hungarians and the Turks, turning his mind alternately towards the one and the other, having several times deceived both of them' (pp. 10v-11r). Finally, Cambini also refers to oral sources and mentions in particular the assistance he received from an interpreter named Giovanni Cerini (p. 85v).

Even if Cambini often highlights the cruelty and violence of the Turks and considers them barbarians, he describes the Ottoman sultans as virtuous leaders, as in the case of Osman I (1258-1324), who is presented as a man of 'great nobility and of modest wealth' and with 'a sagacious wit and a great mind' (pp. 2v-3r). However, Cambini also underscores that the victories of the Ottomans are due not only to their strength and virtue, but also to the lack of conscience and morality of the Christians. Thus, in his account of the Ottomans' military achievements and conquests, he continuously highlights the responsibility of the Greeks, and of the Christians in general, for the loss of Christian territories: Osman's raid on neighbouring Christian countries was facilitated by the Greeks' internal conflicts. This also applies to his successors, as for example Murad I (1359-89), whose conquest of Gallipoli is presented as a consequence of the internal strife between two of the Byzantine emperor's sons in Constantinople. Also during Bayezid I's reign (1389-1402), the Greeks did not defend themselves, Cambini claims, and had it not been for the intervention of the great Muslim leader and enemy of the Ottomans, Tamerlane (1336-1405), Constantinople would have been conquered by the Ottomans at that time. Tamerlane forced Bayezid to turn his attention towards other frontiers, and in the end killed him. Cambini inserts a long digression on Tamerlane and expresses huge admiration for him, commenting that, if there had been an author close to him to write about his achievements, 'beyond doubt he would have been counted among the first captains who are found among the ancient and the moderns' (p. 9r).

Mehmed I (1403-21), and his son and successor Murad II (1421-51, except for 1444-46), who married a Christian (the daughter of George the Despot of Serbia), were hard on the Christians, making them pay many taxes and, in Murad's case, fighting a long war against the Christian feudal lords of the Balkans. Here, he met resistance from another of Cambini's heroes, the Hungarian military leader John Hunyadi (1407-56). Cambini praises Hunyadi highly and claims that Turkish mothers use him to frighten their children: 'Hunyadi is coming', they say, to make them behave properly (p. 12r).

The account of the short peace treaty between Hungary and the Ottomans (p. 12v) again gives Cambini an occasion to launch an accusation against the Christians among whom, apart from Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (1396-1467), the pope could not find anyone to participate in a crusade to help the Greeks (p. 13r). In his account of the

Ottoman-Hungarian battles, Cambini emphasises that the final victory of the infidels was not due to their strength but to their number, and he often claims that there were more dead among the Turks than among the Christians (p. 15v).

The second book treats the period of Mehmed II's rule (1451-81). Mehmed was not satisfied with the great empire left by his father; he wanted to extend it and to conquer Constantinople. Again, Cambini inserts a long digression about the Greeks' vain cry for help to the other Christian kings and princes. They try to convince them of the manifest danger of the Byzantine Empire falling into the hands of 'such a brutal and cruel enemy nation, thirsty after Christian blood more than wine, or any other liquor' (p. 21v). But even if the Greeks make huge efforts 'to move the other Christians to feel commiseration', and even if they 'pour out fountains of tears, their efforts are vain' because the ears of the Christian princes are deaf and their eyes blind; they are occupied by their 'mutual hatred and private convenience' and they despise the universal and common good (p. 22r).

The fall of Constantinople is described at length and in much more detail than, for instance, in Teodoro Spandugino's contemporary treatise on the Ottomans. Also, Cambini's description is more dramatic, and focuses more on the cruelties of the Turks: 'The number of the victors was almost infinite and they did not have any other desire than to steal and lustfully to satisfy their bestial appetite, and being very dedicated to carnal voluptuousness and being cruel by nature, they did not spare anyone because of age or gender, but mixed up rapes with killings, and death with rapes' (p. 25v). He describes the destruction of the church of Santa Sophia with a similar sense of horror: '[it] is contaminated with all the dirtiness one can imagine, becoming a whores' brothel and a horses' stable', while the relics of the saints are thrown in the streets and trampled by men, dogs and pigs (p. 26r).

In his account of the conquests of Mehmed in Greece and the Balkans, Cambini presents another 'hero', the Albanian Christian and 'excellent captain' Scanderbeg, who has 'bravely defended Albania against the infidels, fighting only for religious zeal to maintain the belief of his nation in the faith of Christ's Gospel' (p. 30r). Only when Scanderbeg dies does Mehmed succeed in conquering the country.

Cambini's third book begins with the death of Mehmed and the accession to throne of Bayezid II (1481). He recounts the rivalry of Mehmed's two sons and how Bayezid succeeds with the help of the Janissaries, and his younger half-brother, Cem, is banished to Europe, first under the

protection of the Knights of St John on the island of Rhodes and ultimately under that of the pope.

Cambini then describes the Ottomans' battles against the Mamluks in the Middle East and against the Venetians in Greece (especially during the war with Venice 1499-1502), and finally, he dwells on another succession battle between Bayezid's sons Selim I and Ahmet. He explains that, while Bayezid preferred Ahmet, the Janissaries preferred Selim, since he was 'by nature ambitious and only finds pleasure in using arms and riding horses', and because they were convinced that their situation would be much better under him than under Ahmet (p. 66v). After abdicating the throne in favour of Selim, Bayezid II leaves for Adrianople but falls ill and dies before getting there, 'or of grief or, rather, of poison, according to most people' (p. 68r).

The fourth book deals with Selim I's reign (1512-20), in particular with his campaigns in Syria and Egypt (1516-17). Cambini first recounts in detail that Selim I is obsessed with the idea of killing his brother Ahmet and how he succeeds and, after having removed these 'domestic obstacles', he turns his attention to the campaign in the Middle East against the Mamluks, after which the Ottoman Empire becomes the dominant power in the region and in the Islamic world. The final events of Cambini's account concern Selim's preparations for another sea attack, directed towards either Rhodes or Italy (p. 85r). However, at the moment when the army and all the soldiers were ready, the sultan called off the whole campaign without any visible reason. Cambini guesses that it might be because Selim had fallen ill (p. 85v), since during the winter he discovered a 'cancerous abscess' in the kidneys that caused 'a sore so big that a hand could enter it' (p. 85v). Finishing his account in 1520, shortly after Selim's death, Cambini describes Selim as a leader who has 'achieved many extraordinary things' (p. 86r).

This account by Cambini belongs to a new tendency in historical writings on the Turks to relate their history in a more objective way than was the case in earlier 14th- and 15th-century treatises. Many of the writings from the beginning of the 16th century, beginning with Machiavelli's analyses of the Ottoman Empire, thus focus on political and military aspects and to a lesser degree than previously on religious or moral judgments. Cambini can be compared to contemporary Italian authors such as Giovio, Spandugino and Menavino, and like them he inserts several moral judgments concerning the Christians. But he does not refrain from judging the Ottomans too, and he thus differs at some central points from the other authors. Unlike Menavino and Spandugino, he does not

include many observations on the customs and society of the Turks. He had not travelled in the Ottoman Empire as they had, and to compile his historical work he had to rely on information from second-hand sources such as textual material or actual travellers (the majority of these introductions to the East came from the various Italian states, especially Venice). Cambini's account is more focused on military deeds, strategies and weapons, than on ethnographic characterisation. He describes the Ottoman sultans, their campaigns, and the composition of their armies, and again, unlike Spandugino and Menavino, he focuses on the sultans' cruelty, basing his account on a more unambiguous division between the Christians and their cruel, Ottoman enemies. His account is designed to increase the knowledge of Ottoman history among Christians, but at the same time it does contribute to the spreading of fear, and stirring up fervour for crusade.

In comparison with contemporary authors, Cambini's style too is a little more narrative and a little more 'sensational' – and thus popular. He focuses on actions and descriptions rather than analyses. He tells of the preparations for military campaigns, and gives details about battles, strategies, weapons and numbers of deaths. He recounts anecdotes and provides geographical explanations. He seems to consider his account a history both in the sense of historical writing and in the sense of storytelling. In fact, he frequently uses the same narrative device as is found in the chivalric romances of Boiardo and Ariosto, when the narrator returns to the narration after a long digression: *Ma tornando alla historia nostra* ('But returning to our history'), *Ma ritornando alla narratione delle cose turchesche* ('But returning to our narration about the Turkish matters'), or *Ma tornando alla narratione della historia nostra dove al principio la lasciamo* ('But returning to the narration of our history where we left it at the beginning'). This rhetorical device, stemming from the oral narrative tradition, serves to retain the audience's attention, while moving between different narrative episodes. Perhaps Cambini had been influenced by the very popular literary genre of the chivalric poem when he lived in Ferrara during the 1480s – a period in which Boiardo was also active at the court of Ferrara, performing and writing his *Orlando innamorato* for the Este princes. Or perhaps Cambini had read or listened to Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, which had been printed in a first version in 1516.

Cambini's more polemical (and popular) tone regarding the Turks is also reflected in his use of a crusade rhetoric similar to that used by Pius II and other quattrocento humanists (and, again, the terminology of the

chivalric poems dealing with medieval conflicts between Saracens and Christians): the Ottomans are frequently called by their medieval names of 'infidels', 'infidel occupiers of Greece' and 'enemies of the faith', and the war against them is considered a *gloriosa impresa*. Their religion is frequently referred to in medieval terms such as 'Muḥammad's bestial and foolish sect' – though the more neutral 'Muslim religion' can be found too.

Cambini's description of the fall of Constantinople is much longer than, for instance, in Spandugino's treatise, and he focuses to a much greater degree on the violence of the Ottomans as they repeat their meaningless rapes, killings and cruel slaughter of Christians. Lara Michelacci has emphasised that Cambini continuously 'stresses the distance between us and the other', describing the bloody praxis of the Ottoman succession to power, the savage treatment of Constantinople in 1453, and the portrait of Ottoman soldiers as preoccupied with 'primary needs', in contrast to the Christian army which prepares itself through religious devotion ('Il profilo del nemico', p. 158). Cambini does indeed repeat and dwell on the stereotypical picture of the Turks when he claims that 'the Turks are ambitious and avid to extend their domain' (p. 14v), and when he characterises them in terms of 'lust', 'bestial (...) appetite', 'carnal voluptuousness', and their 'cruel nature'. It is as though the tone of his writing gets closer to the chivalric poems when depicting the fall of Constantinople. For example, when he writes that the Turks 'mixed rape with murder, and death with rape', he might even have been inspired by Ariosto, who inserts a long historical digression on the Turks in song XVII of *Orlando furioso*, claiming among other things that: '(...) the Turks and Moors had overrun all their lands, committing rape and murder, pillage and outrage' (*Orlando furioso*, song XVII:6).

Thus, Cambini does not seem to have lost interest in the 'lurid details' of the alleged primordial barbarity of the Turks, as Meserve claims. He does count on more accurate information from travellers and ambassadors, but he does not represent a 'dispassionate empiricism', as contemporary authors might (Meserve, *Empires of Islam*, p. 241).

Cambini's negative judgment of the Ottomans and his focus on the brutality of their empire is also interesting in the light of his affiliation to Florence and to the Medici, since Lorenzo de' Medici, who played an important role in Cambini's youth, was known as a Turcophile leader. At a mature age, Cambini thus contradicts Lorenzo's opinion, although there are other instances of humanists differing from their patrons' Turkish policies, such as Marsilio Ficino, who openly took pro-crusading

positions despite Lorenzo de' Medici's known admiration for them. One could argue that Cambini had broken with the Medici almost two decades before he began writing his treatise on the Turks. With his treatise he might instead seem to be approaching the policy of the Holy See.

Nonetheless, Cambini's account of the Ottomans is not without admiration for them, and as in contemporary historical writings on the Turks, these elements of his account perform the function of a mirror for Christian readers: the professional character of the Ottoman army is highlighted – they were well paid, and thus made their lord happy by 'being in order both in terms of the bridling of their horses and their own clothing' (p. 49v); several times Cambini mentions the orderliness of the soldiers ('with his people ordered he conveyed to Cilicia' (pp. 50v, 58r and many other examples). Some of the sultans are characterised as very generous: after a battle, Bayezid returns to Constantinople, and re-orders his incomes 'without any sign of avarice or greed' (p. 49v), and the fourth and final book concludes with an anecdote about Selim, who is said to have returned some stolen goods to the Florentines at the end of his life: the story about the sultan's fairness and generosity is told to Cambini by a 'Persian of Muslim religion' in Florence, and translated by Cambini's interpreter, Giovanni Cerini. It is said that Selim's advisor, 'Perino Bascia', suggests to Selim to fetch some of the valuables he has stolen, and spend them before his death to build a hospital in order to leave a memorial to himself. Selim, however, answers that he does not want to 'honour himself with others' things' but instead wishes to return the valuables to those to whom they belong, 'and so he did' (p. 86v). Cambini explicitly uses this anecdote to moralise against the Christians: 'and this is said to confuse our Christian princes in whom in a case like that, I doubt, one would hardly see similar remorse of conscience' (p. 86v). The Ottomans thus function as a mirror to make the Christians reflect on their own lack of morality. Cambini does praise a few Christian heroes, such as George Scanderbeg and John Hunyadi, but he often blames the Christians for their internal strife and for their greed and selfishness.

Cambini's treatise is not subdivided into thematic parts that distinguish between chronological battle accounts and descriptions of Ottoman society and customs, as is the case with travellers such as Menavino and Spandugino. However, there are exceptions, and he does insert a few observations about Ottoman society and customs, as when he comments on Turkish polygamy: 'the nation of Turks have many lawful wives' (p. 10v), or when he makes linguistic observations and tells his readers the Turkish equivalent of certain expressions (p. 12v), or when he states

that the Ottoman empire is 'a nation in which the children of private individuals are born happier than the children of the Lord and other Princes' (p. 18r), alluding to the practice of fratricide and patricide during the seizure of power.

Finally, when he explains the reactions to Selim's victories in the Middle East, Cambini inserts a long ethnographical digression on the Arabs, mainly in Africa, who remain sceptical about the Ottoman rule. He explains that these Arabs, 'whose frontiers since the beginning have been at the river Euphrates, and at present extend until the Ocean and who have populated the whole of Egypt and Africa, having continuously been at war with their neighbouring countries (...) they do not have either fixed or stationary homes, but like the Scythians they live on carts (...)'. (p. 83v). These nomad Arabs, Cambini says, do not mix with other nations through marriage or in other ways, because they consider themselves the most noble and ancient generation of the world. He concludes his digression by praising the generosity of these peoples towards foreigners who happen to come to their countries, and claims that, if they did not cultivate so many old hostilities among one other, they could easily have subdued all their neighbouring countries. Perhaps Cambini, again is holding up a mirror to his Christian readers.

SIGNIFICANCE

Cambini's work enjoyed great success. The Venice 1541 edition, a compilation that comprised Paolo Giovio and Andrea Cambini's works on the Turks, as well as a life of Scanderbeg (probably written by Marino Barlezio), is a sign of their editorial success and of the enterprise of the Venetian printing house of Aldo Manuzio.

When Cambini's treatise was translated into English in 1562, it had a great influence on English writings on the Turks: according to K. Petkov, his description of discord and rivalries among the Balkan rulers, both internal and external, contains details that were 'taken into English political, theological and sociological tracts to prove the disastrous consequences of civil dissension' ('England and the Balkan Slavs', pp. 86-117).

According to P. Preto, Cambini's work, together with other works of the same 'simple' and 'popular' style, was a widely read source of information on the Ottomans (*Venezia e i Turchi*, p. 14), while in his influential work on the fall of Constantinople, Steven Runciman claims that 'useful information can be obtained from the Florentine Andrea Cambini. For his work on Ottoman history, written towards the end of the 15th century, he seems to have consulted survivors from the siege' (*The fall of*

Constantinople, p. 197). This comment, though inaccurate about Cambini's sources, gives an idea of the influence of his work.

MANUSCRIPTS

MS Madrid, BNE – 17585 (16th century)

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

Tvvo very notable commentaries, the one of the originall of the Turcks and Empire of the house of Ottomanno, written by Andrewe Cambine, and thother of the warres of the Turcke against George Scanderbeg, prince of Epiro, and of the great victories obteyned by the sayd George, as well against the Emperour of Turkie, as other princes, and of his other rare force and vertues, worthye of memorye, translated oute of Italian into Englishe by Iohn Shute, London: Rouland Hall for Humfrey, 1562

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Pia Schwarz Lausten

Ludovico Ariosto

DATE OF BIRTH 8 September 1474
 PLACE OF BIRTH Reggio Emilia
 DATE OF DEATH 6 July 1533
 PLACE OF DEATH Ferrara

BIOGRAPHY

One of the major poets of the Italian Renaissance, Ludovico Ariosto was born in 1474 in Reggio Emilia to Niccolò Ariosto (an employee of Ercole I d'Este) and Daria Malaguzzi Valeri. In 1484, the family moved to Ferrara, where, following the wishes of his father, Ludovico studied law at the local university from 1489 to 1494. Afterwards, unwilling to pursue a legal career, he applied himself to the study of Latin under the guidance of Gregorio da Spoleto, while participating in the vibrant cultural life of the ducal court. He established enduring friendships with prominent humanists and poets, such as Alberto Pio da Carpi, Ercole Strozzi and Pietro Bembo, and took his first steps as a poet, writing predominantly in Latin.

Niccolò Ariosto's death in 1500 left Ludovico in charge of his large family. In 1501, he accepted the position of commander of the citadel of Canossa, and in 1503 entered the service of Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, a brother of the ducal heir, Alfonso. Towards the end of that year, he took minor orders, which enabled him to receive ecclesiastical benefits. As the cardinal's courtier, he was expected to carry out a variety of tasks, ranging from administrative work to diplomatic missions to the Holy See during the War of the Holy League (1508-16). Having witnessed from close up the dramatic events that marked the first decades of the 16th century, he made numerous references to contemporary history in *Orlando furioso*, a poem designed to celebrate his patron and the Este dynasty.

Ariosto embarked on the composition of *Orlando furioso* in 1504-6. The first edition (a 40-canto version) was printed in 1516. Ariosto resented the cardinal's lack of appreciation of his masterpiece and their relationship soured beyond repair in 1517, when the poet refused to accompany Ippolito to Hungary. That year, Ariosto composed his first *Satira*, a satirical poem in tercets in which he gave vent to his frustration at the cardinal's behaviour. In the period between 1517 and 1525, he penned seven