

# The Sword and the Pen: Women, Politics, and Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Siena

Konrad Eisenbichler

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The Sword and the Pen: Women, Politics, and Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Siena Konrad Eisenbichler In *The Sword and the Pen: Women, Politics, and Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Siena*, Konrad Eisenbichler analyzes the work of Sienese women poets, in particular, Aurelia Petrucci, Laudomia Forteguerri, and Virginia Salvi, during the first half of the sixteenth century up to the fall of Siena in 1555. Eisenbichler sets forth a complex and original interpretation of the experiences of these three educated noblewomen and their contributions to contemporary culture in Siena by looking at the emergence of a new lyric tradition and the sonnets they exchanged among themselves and with their male contemporaries. Through the analysis of their poems and various book dedications to them, Eisenbichler reveals the intersection of poetry, politics, and sexuality, as well as the gendered dialogue that characterized Siena's literary environment during the late Renaissance. Eisenbichler also examines other little-known women poets and their relationship to the cultural environment of Siena, underlining the exceptional role of the city of Siena as the most important center of women's writing in the first half of the sixteenth century in Italy, and probably in all of Europe.

This innovative contribution to the field of late Renaissance and early modern Italian and women's studies rescues from near oblivion a group of literate women who were celebrated by contemporary scholars but who have been largely ignored today, both because of a dearth of biographical information about them and because of a narrow evaluation of their poetry. Eisenbichler's analysis and reproduction of many of their poems in Italian and modern English translation are an invaluable contribution not only to Italian cultural studies but also to women's studies.

"Konrad Eisenbichler's succinct, scholarly, and highly readable introduction to Sienese politics and culture in the 1530s–50s opens this field up for the first time to the nonspecialist reader, while at the same time providing much fresh material of value to specialists. Rich in biographical detail and centered on three of the most remarkable Sienese female protagonists of the period, it makes compelling reading for anyone with an interest in early modern women and their social and cultural worlds." —Virginia Cox, New York University

"At one level this is a rich and exhaustive study of three fascinating Sienese women poets, their poetry, their lives, and the lively intellectual circles they moved in and fostered. But at the same time it is an intriguing historical and literary detective story that ranges widely and deeply through archives and largely forgotten texts to rediscover a group of important women writers who, for the most part, have been ignored by history and the literary canon. As such, it stands as a powerful model and as a call for future studies that would recover the lost treasures of a powerful tradition that has been virtually deleted from our literary past."

#### -Guido Ruggiero, University of Miami

"Combining expert research, informative analysis, and fine storytelling, Konrad Eisenbichler's *The Sword* and the Pen shows readers what was so remarkable about the women who chose lyric poetry as a medium for expressing their friendship and political views in war-torn sixteenth-century Siena. In the process, he reveals a Sienese community alive with literary conversations among men and women. The translations at the end of the book are more than icing on the cake; they are the means by which we can now bring these poets into our classrooms." —Deanna Shemek, University of California, Santa Cruz

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