

Return to the Light

Lo Stato di Siena antico, e moderno:
the “laborious enterprise”

The inhabitants of the state of Siena should thus reflect on the fertility of the soil and consider its vastness and extent, the copious supply of water, the rivers, the pastures, the forests, and woodlands with fruit trees and firewood, from which they can easily decide to draw benefit by trade and commerce, and then they will be able to be as wealthy as they were in the past, and we shall see the mountains, hills, valleys and plains repopulated, and Siena, and her State, will be the envy of the other provinces.
(from the introduction to Tome I, pp. XIII-XIV)

The appearance of this sixth volume brings to a close the publication of *Lo Stato di Siena Antico, e Moderno* by Giovanni Antonio Pecci (1693-1768), a seminal source for the history of Siena and its territory. The project was long promoted and pursued by the Accademia Senese degli Intronati, of which Pecci became a member at a very young age, in 1715, taking the academic name of “Colorito.” He served as its Secretary from 1733 to 1737 and as Archintronato (president) for the two-year term 1756-1757, always claiming for it a position of preeminence among academic associations, and not only in Siena.

This edition of *Lo Stato di Siena* is a major publishing initiative (3,600 pages transcribed, 196 localities described and discussed), edited by Mario De Gregorio and Dorian Mazzini, which began in 2007 and saw the first volume appear in 2009. It is based on an autograph manuscript in eleven volumes now in the rare books collection (Fondo librario antico) of Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena, which is the final revised and corrected version of the work.

Credit is due to the Accademia Senese degli Intronati, the Italian Ministry of Cultural Affairs, and, for this sixth volume, to Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena for believing in this important project, which was ten years in the making.

Giovanni Antonio Pecci (Siena, 1693-1768)

Recent decades have witnessed a substantial “rediscovery” of the work of Giovanni Antonio Pecci, a figure who in eighteenth-century Siena was always considered a “contrarian” intellectual, often (if not always) the target of hostility, underestimation, and discredit of his work, which was often emphatically described as “the usual nonsense.”

A topic for investigation could be what, at bottom, were the real reasons for a polemic aimed, constantly and on every side, towards the work of this noble Knight of Saint Stephen. It could be asked, in short, if the acrimony lurking in countless elucidations, glosses, and polemical responses to his published writings should be attributed to real shortcomings in Pecci’s work or if it might not instead be the result of an ill-concealed intolerance on the part of local opposition circles, or again a generalized struggle on the part of the Siennese literati of the eighteenth century to grasp the most up-to-date critical and rationalist approaches and methodologies, or again a more generic ostracism more markedly political or class-oriented in origin.

This last context helps explain Pecci’s acknowledged intolerance of recent behavior of the ancient aristocracy of Siena, land-owning and parasitic, to which he belonged, and his presumed personal alignment with a supposed coterie of republican sympathizers in Siena. At the time this claim set off a furious debate, but now, in light of his later works, it can be definitively debunked.

What is certain is that Pecci represents in the panorama of Siena erudition the most fully-accomplished point of passage towards critical/rationalist approaches influenced by the thought of Lodovico Antonio Muratori, committed as he was in the course of his prolific writing activity to rendering immediately evident the real and stubborn resistance encountered at the local level to an approach to history and scholarship aimed, yes, at illustrating the homeland, but with a new – and appropriate – intent to clarify and demystify. In terms of his approach to and exercise of erudition, Pecci remains in essence an isolated forerunner in the panorama of Sienese culture and historiography in the two decades bridging the middle of the eighteenth century. In a city “where studies of every sort... should flourish,” as he confided four years before his death, “nobody, nobody, either in the noble class or that of the other people of Siena, have I ever found who showed a taste for making the most of the history and knowledge of the homeland, so that finding myself totally alone, it befits me to copy everything myself, research everything myself, and what is worse, nobody bothers even to listen, if not with disdain, to the memories of our ancestors.” After the failure of Pompeo Neri’s visionary plan in the early 1740s to innovate the traditional system of financing the Studium Senese, break up the ossified, detrimental endogamy of faculty recruiting, and establish finally a virtuous circle among the university, research, and local institutions, Siena had to wait until the second half of the 1760s to see the tumultuous and in some ways traumatic (because forcedly juxtaposed and in essence never absorbed on a local level) entrance of Enlightenment culture into the fields of literature and history, even though concretely anticipated precisely by Pecci in certain aspects and in a new methodology for history, almost in spite of the practically immobile and uninterested cultural context of the city. In a word, Pecci’s scholarly research tended, perhaps in a too innovative way for Siena and in the wake of the production of the most aware part of the erudite movement, to stand out distinctly in the social context of the time.

**Lo Stato di Siena antico, e moderno:
the “laborious enterprise” (1758-1768)**

Looking in the voluminous corpus of Pecci’s work for consistent continuity, we cannot avoid noting that among his writings, published or unpublished, there is not one page that does not look exclusively at the context of Siena and its history, in a constant re-proposition of its antiquity and prestige that gives bone and sinew to the sort of more or less “exceptionalist” long view which imprints the entire cultural experience of Siena from the middle of the sixteenth century and the fall of the republic onwards. It is a matter, reading more closely between the lines of the historiography and local hagiography of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of an obstinate, insistent claim of a specific, enduring Sienese identity, identifiable from the very origin of the city and so peculiarly distinguishing as to define the traits of a real difference from everybody else. In Pecci the proposition of this, traversed by a reexamination of the historiography and documents in line with Muratori and the new scholarly rationalism, is in effect polemically and politically set before the obduracy of the new dominators, the resignation of the local people, and the consequent dangers deriving from a loss of awareness of the city’s very identity.

What distinguishes – this seems to be the question that emerges from Pecci’s entire body of work – this city from others, this territory from others? The past, to be sure, made up of an illustrious history, of nobility deriving from the dominion of a vast territory, of prestigious figures because of their origins and the offices they held, of celebrated localities scattered through the countryside, of unique traditions, rites and celebrations well-established in the memory of the members of the community, but also the capacity and prospects for a possible and hoped-for redemption.

Pecci fully grasped the message coming from the rationalistic/erudite world: “The history that we are devising,” Marco Foscarin had written, “aims at being the understanding and careful, philologically convincing recovery of a complex reality, made up not only and not so much of wars and treaties, but of institutions, the practice of commerce, the changing customs, schools, studies, and culture, the transformation of the conditions of the land, the popular traditions, and the little things that happen in the life of a group.” This perspective for Pecci, working critically on the past and on the tradition not based on documents, remains at the core that of an attempt to overcome the current crisis, a reappropriation of an entire cultural and historical heritage, by reestablishing the terms of a Sienese vitality that, despite the

prevailing indolent neglect, was nonetheless intrinsic to the city and its territory. This is, at bottom, the sense of the effort in Lo Stato to “encourage the Sienese towards agriculture, crafts, and commerce,” and the meaning of such a detailed, capillary identification of diversified economic resources, in keeping with the renewed scientific culture of eighteenth-century Tuscany.

Lo Stato di Siena antico, e moderno thus constitutes in some way a summa of Pecci’s long archival research and writing activity and his insistent “political use” of the history of Siena. This work is without question – together with his earlier *Memorie Storico-critiche della Città di Siena* – the most accomplished example of this use. The construction of a history of the authority and nobility of the state of Siena and a detailed description of its activity, prestige and perhaps even primacy on the Italian and international scene is an attempt to reiterate, in the face of the historical and dynastic passages that the Grand Duchy of Tuscany was undergoing in that period, the dignity of an entire territory and its having been (before the deflagration of internal discords and, even more, of a new European order decreed its demise) an integral core of a state that was as respected and strong as others, if not more.

All of this with a secular, politically clear-eyed attitude, devoid of superstructures raised by tradition or myth, in which the schema of the primacy of sources and witnesses derived from Muratori is accompanied by an interest in knowing about the economic, natural, and social resources of the localities of the ancient state, in an overall view of history which is certainly very modern and is the child of the scholarly debate that was dawning not only in Tuscany and continued in the post-mid-century attempts at reform that anticipated and accompanied the emergence of Enlightenment culture.

Perhaps the structure itself of the work, so strongly criticized as to prevent its publication, gives a full picture of the impracticable fate of an underlying political design on the part of the author, even in the presence of the repeated expression of the weight of dashed hopes for change and the strong, culturally nostalgic claim for the city of a glorious past of privileges and authoritativeness, historically definable and chronologically circumscribable, whose story can be narrated.

Pecci’s position harks back to a principally cultural context, traversed however by a keen, indispensable attention to the present, to the destiny – plausibly without a future – of what was left of the leadership class and the current socio-economic conditions of the ancient dominion. In this work, more than in the others, Pecci shows himself to be an involved and well-prepared intellectual, deeply disillusioned and impassionedly participating in the vicissitudes of an entire city in decline, in the atmosphere of the dying Medici domination, in the doubts and hopes of a transition, and finally in the harsh impact with the new dominators. Any possible redemption – this is the message that seems to emerge from the work as a whole – comes first and foremost via a detailed awareness of one’s history, the legitimate one though, stripped truly and definitively of superstructures not founded on documentary and rationalistic bases.

It is in a trend of extreme critical erudition, of almost obsessive adherence to the primacy and indispensability of documents for the purpose of writing history, of a secular attitude with a strong rationalist bent, that Pecci’s historical works are born. *Lo Stato di Siena Antico, e Moderno* springs from this outlook. A history made up of documents, but also – through reference to them and an insistence on their transcription and publication – of Pecci’s obstinate desire to “uncover misinterpretations, point out partiality, and demonstrate errors,” in other words to expose myths, tear down unfounded traditions and privileges, and go back always and in every case to the sources, to a reconstruction of history made up of irreproachable documentary, epigraphic, archeological, lapidary proof, which is the only reliable witness of historical truth.

The Genesis of Lo Stato

This work was begun between 1757 and 1758, after a long phase of preparatory research in local archives, accompanied by continued contacts with local men of learning in the localities being examined and the distribution of a circular letter to local authorities asking for information that could be used to reconstruct the history and documents in the greatest possible detail (*Novelle letterarie di Firenze*, 28 July 1758, no. 30, cols. 470-476, but also printed separately). It represents a sort of overall synthesis of Pecci’s scholarly activity, in which the usual schema of the primacy of archival and other documentary sources for the purposes of history and the tenacious contesting of memories not supported by written documents is

joined – besides by a reconstruction of the dense fabric of events involving the territory – by an interest in the development of the history and institutions of that area and an evaluation of the economic, demographic, natural and social resources of the ancient state of Siena.

But, in the face of the complexity of such an intriguing project, with a history constructed in large part starting from the periphery, the traditional hostility towards Pecci's work, with its denouncement of a social and economic breakdown caused by bad government and patrician neglect, its objections to a series of privileges held by the nobility over the local communities during a period of lively debate about the aristocracy itself, and the obstacles placed in his path by the Grand Duke's general auditor Stefano Bertolini, inevitably conditioned the laborious writing of the work, determining for this "Sienese Repetti" the bitter fate of "unpublished author," subjected later to the episodic publication of abridged passages about individual localities often carried out in an amateurish and incompetent manner.

After writing a volume of Sketches (Abbozzi, Biblioteca Moreniana, Florence, Pecci manuscripts 73-78), Pecci, taking note of the limited willingness to furnish him materials on the part of grand-ducal functionaries serving in the localities of the state, was forced to pursue his research by going personally to these places and talking with local intellectuals, making the work in essence a "collective effort."

Pecci prepared an autograph manuscript in six volumes in 1761 (Archivio di Stato di Siena, mss. D 67-72), and then completed a further edition of eleven volumes the following year (Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati di Siena, mss. B IV 8-18). Attempts to publish this second version were made by the Sienese bookseller and publisher Vincenzo Pazzini Carli and later by the printer Giusti in Lucca, who circulated a pre-publication subscription appeal and printed some sample pages.

A final revised and corrected version was undertaken by the author in the mid-1760s and finished a few months before his death (it is now in the rare books section of the Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena archives).

The current ten-year project of transcription and complete publication of the work was based on this last version, which was virtually unknown up to now to students of local history but is an unavoidable point of reference for an edition whose goal was to provide a definitive, unabridged version of the work, one that can offer, through explanatory notes and the modernization of the vast wealth of documentary sources indicated by the author following a widespread methodology used by scholars of his time and now an invaluable support for modern-day historical and archival research.

In addition, the faithful reproduction of the coats of arms included by Pecci to illustrate his description of individual localities has been integrated in this sixth and final volume by the publication of a short, hitherto unpublished manuscript that is shelved next to this work in the bank's rare books collection; even though not directly attributable to Pecci, it is an excellent example of the iconographical research on the arms of communities comprising Siena's old territory carried out by Sienese scholars over the years.

The method of Lo Stato

The enormous apparatus of notes and bibliographical references that characterize the work, the compilation's great strong point, is in essence for Pecci the framework into which to insert his detailed reconstruction of events involving the individual localities of the ancient republic.

The erudite approach influenced by the teachings of Muratori in his *Rerum italicarum Scriptores* and *Antiquitates italicæ mediæ ævi* is clearly evident in *Lo Stato*, intersecting with Pecci's profound knowledge of the holdings of the private and public archives of Siena in the early eighteenth century, formed to be sure by a taste for history that was manifest already in his youth, but strengthened substantially by the decision in January 1734 by the Collegio di Balìa of Siena to draw up a general index of the documents pertaining to this important magistracy of the Commune of Siena, a project assigned to Pecci, who was

proposed by Rinaldo Buoninsegni, in exchange for his being allowed to keep a “rough draft” of the summaries and/or transcriptions of the documents consulted.

This was a major undertaking of indexing and transcription, aimed more at gathering and copying information than at drawing up inventories and organizing papers. The young Pecci worked on it for almost a decade, until 1743, when the appointment of a new Secretary of the Laws resulted in his being definitively denied “permission to continue the work of inventory of the books of the General Council of the Bell.” However, by then the copy of the enormous mass of documents of the public archives of Siena was actually already in Pecci’s possession.

The work that would benefit most from this early, formative archival activity would be *Lo Stato di Siena antico, e moderno*, in which Pecci delineates the history of the 196 localities that once made up the territory of the ancient republic, comparing the documents with contemporary chronicles and the appropriate bibliographical and historiographic references.

The project of a fully elaborated work that would weave together the original documentation with reliable chronicles and early and more recent bibliography officially took concrete form on 3 July 1758 in a letter circulated by Pecci to all the “Signori Rappresentanti” (official heads) of “so many noble cities, populous towns, and considerable castle villages that, with distinguished splendor, compose the domain of Siena.” The aim of the missive, for the purposes of a reliable historical reconstruction of the events involving the individual places, was a search for documents preserved in the public and private archives of the locality, information about oral or written memoirs, an indication of religious buildings, natural resources, particular crops, industries, curiosities, illustrious personages, and any other things of interest. The letter, organized in twenty-four questions and printed in numerous copies, asked about geographical configuration, boundaries, churches and convents existing in the area and the diocese to which they belonged, plaques and coats of arms, official charters, fortified buildings, fortresses, courthouses and other prestigious buildings. In addition, he asked about any mining activities, the oldest and most important families, and illustrious men or women.

While it is true that Pecci began receiving answers to his letter in July 1758, it is also true that these were contributions from a limited number of local intellectuals with whom Pecci had already been in frequent correspondence for some time. These included the chancellor of Sinalunga Andrea Grazi, Giuseppe Camaiori of Giuncarico, Giovanni Battista Davitti of Torrita, Tullio Canali of Montalcino, the chancellor Luigi Antonio Paolozzi, the canon Giacomo Boldrini of Grosseto, and the bishop of Pienza Francesco Maria Piccolomini. Most of the functionaries made no effort to satisfy his requests, whether out of lack of interest in the search or because of a real inability to do so, as was the case with the priors of Serre di Rapolano, who sent some information to Pecci on 6 March 1759 accompanied by a humble apology for the delay, which was the fault of a local intellectual: “We are poor peasants, used to reading hoes or ploughshares and writing with a rough knife on the back of an ox (this said with all due respect for your Illustrious Lordship), so you can see that, in order in some way to satisfy your request, we have had to turn to someone outside our usual circle and to keep after him for some months, begging him and then begging him again, but he replied to all our pleas by telling us to hold our peace, that the community of Serre did not possess any archives; but as the old proverb says truly, the insistent beggar wins out over the miser, so that in the end we have managed to get these answers.”

The priors of Serre had obtained the information from Rev. Anton Domenico Lagli, priest of the church of Sant’Andrea, who had drafted in that same period the *Istoria del Castello e Contorni delle Serre a Rapolano* just for Pecci; he in turn thanked the priors, complimenting the person who “put together the historical information” because “he possesses knowledge, doctrine, experience and erudition.”

In reality his attention to local writers was not always as benevolent as it was to the priest of Serre; indeed Pecci would always evaluate rigorously the work of local chroniclers, often mistrusting and sometimes refusing their reports because they were “too enthusiastic and less well-informed than national historians.” His consistent scholarly approach to a primarily document-based construction of history, in short,

compelled him not to accept any deviations from this line and enabled Pecci to challenge anything that was not supported by carefully verified archival and bibliographical evidence, wherever it came from. This was the case with local historians such as Spinello Benci of Montepulciano, Giugurta Tommasi and Orlando Malavolti of Siena, Cipriano Manente and Monalto Monaldeschi of Orvieto.

The scarcity of information received from local administrators of justice is evident from the marginal glosses that characterize the work. The majority of these refer to documents preserved in collections present still today in large part in the Archivio di Stato di Siena, the heir since its inception, by personal decree of Grand Duke Leopold II on 17 November 1858, of all the documentation preserved in the two great Siennese archives, the Diplomatico e delle Riformagioni and the Archivio generale dei Contratti. For the most part, these references pertain to the books of resolutions of the General Council of the Republic and of the Balìa and parchments in the Diplomatico section. Very few documents come from the archives of the communities of the Siennese state, demonstrating the extremely limited contribution of the local magistracies to Pecci's project.

On 19 March 1759, a year after his circular was sent out, in a letter to a man of letters in Chianciano, Luigi Antonio Paolozzi, Pecci described how he intended to proceed in the writing of his work. Even though he had only received twenty-four responses from the priors to whom he had sent the circular, he planned to divide the opus into eleven volumes, the first ten dealing with the ten Capitanati of the state of Siena and the eleventh concerning the feuds and towns that were once subjects of the republic. The two final versions, one in the Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati in Siena and the other in the Banca dei Paschi di Siena's Fondo Librario Antico, are in fact in eleven volumes, but the 196 localities are listed in alphabetical order. Unwilling to wait any longer, at the beginning of August 1759 Pecci began writing the history of the state of Siena. On 10 March 1760 he wrote to the councilor of the Regency Pompeo Neri that he was already working on volume four.

Once it was ready for printing, the work encountered considerable obstacles to its publication. The discredit that had always surrounded Pecci's writings in Siena, the difficulties encountered in obtaining permission to print from the General Auditor of the time, Stefano Bertolini, "who is the stingiest, most nitpicking man imaginable," and the aversion of many noble families of Siena who traditionally held privileges and immunities in the towns of the territory led him in the end to leave it in manuscript form.