

## HEARD IN THE CORRIDORS

**Lana Martysheva** – This is the story of a "book of notable things of our time", to use the author's words, or rather of a book project, which was never published. It exists in the form of three handwritten collections of autographs from the sixteenth century. Preserved in the National Library of Rome, these short texts tell us about popes, cardinals, ambassadors, but also about their less illustrious contemporaries. The author's name is Camillo Capilupi. He was born in 1531 in the north of the Italian peninsula, in Mantua. But at a young age, he left the city of the Gonzagas for papal Rome, where he would remain until the end of the century. He lived with his uncle in a palace in Campo Marzio, now via dei Prefetti, in the district now dominated by the institutions of the Italian Republic. Camillo went through the city, to go to the apostolic palace, and to carry out various missions for the dukes of Mantua.

By being so intimate, these stories give us a unique account of the Roman court of the sixteenth century. One enters the corridors of power to hear the jokes of ambassadors and prelates but also criticism, including against the sovereign pontiffs. Thus, several episodes testify to a disagreement at the Roman court with the policy of persecution of prostitutes, carried out in Rome by Pope Pius V. Camillo Capilupi relates and comments on a discussion that took place in the pope's antechamber. The conclusion is that a city as large and cosmopolitan as Rome cannot do without prostitutes, because without them men would be pushed towards much more scandalous vices, such as rape, incest and sodomy. These texts give an idea of what could be said at the papal court and of the taste for the curious, the exotic and the remarkable.

Like the story of the monkey of the famous doctor Fallope who, seeing a cat in labour, proceeded to help her give birth in the manner of a mid-wife. It seems that Capilupi's goal was above all to tell stories that he believed to be true. Among other ways we see this by factual clarifications made in the margins with passages crossed out and rewritten. This happens with a story that was completely deleted about a jealous man who has his testicles cut off so that he can, with certainty, accuse his wife of adultery in the event of the birth of a child. In the margin, Camillo indicates why he ends up eliminating this account: he has learned that it is not true. This is the value of getting access to a book in its making, an unfinished project. From these clues, the historian can highlight the dynamics of the author's approach, his method and his criteria of veracity.

Camillo sometimes tells us his sources of information: his own experience, the account of the Venetian ambassador on the wards against the Ottoman Empire or again, that of a negotiator of the King of Sweden with Moscovy. Through his writing, we get how the Roman court is at the same time focused on itself but also a conduit of international information and a unique point of observation on

the world, eager for great facts and small anecdotes. It is in the interest of the historian to draw on exceptional manuscript sources such as this one so that intellectual history is not always fixated on essential authors such as Machiavelli and not limited to the serious tone derived from the authors of diplomatic dispatches. It should try to rediscover the more informal dimensions of the international circulation of information, between the written and the oral.

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