

The Image of Germany in Enea Silvio Piccolomini's *Germania* (1458): A Trustworthy Historical Source?*

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Abstract

Enea Silvio Piccolomini was an Italian Cardinal and Poet Laureate in the late Middle Ages and in the early Renaissance. In 1458, he wrote an epistolary treatise known as *Germania* to refute Martin Mayr's accusation that Germany became impoverished, for the Papal Curia had been forcing the Germans to pay tithes. The complaint was part of the discourse “*gravamina Germanice nationis*”. It was a discourse deployed by the Germans in the late Middle Ages not to pay money to the Roman Curia. To refute the *gravamina* thesis, Piccolomini developed a brilliant, flattering image of Germany in *Germania*, praising German towns and their opulence. Scholars have categorised Piccolomini's eulogy as “*laudatio nationis*”, a praise for a people, which was a literary genre in the Renaissance culture. Consequently, they tend to have negative assessment of *Germania* regarding the factual insincerity of its representation of Germany due to the rhetorical topos of “*laudatio nationis*” that Piccolomini used in this work. In contrast, my research paper aims to examine the likelihood that Piccolomini's eulogies in *Germania* are historically reliable. The paper asks: What criteria did Piccolomini develop in the presentation of Germany in order to grasp its landscape, people and culture? How did these criteria reflect contemporary notions of an affluent society? Finally, in what way can historians verify “historicity” of Piccolomini's “*laudatio nationis*”? To answer these questions, apart from close reading of *Germania*, this paper primarily deals with other contemporary sources, most notably correspondence and other writings of Piccolomini, as well as travelogues from late medieval Germany. As it will emerge, my research article argues that the image of Germany as

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depicted in *Germania* was far from rhetorical invention. It neatly corresponded with other contemporary sources, and therefore it can be used as historical evidence for further study of urban life, population and its culture as well as historical conception of cultural grandeur in fifteenth-century Germany.

Keywords: Piccolomini, Pope Pius II, *Germania*, *laudatio nationis*, *gravamina Germanice nationis*

Introduction

In the summer of 1457 Martin Mayr, the chancellor of Archbishop of Mainz, penned a line to his friend, just recently appointed Cardinal, named Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405-1464), who was also the Bishop of Siena, a town in rural Tuscany. Mayr's missive became one of the most famous letters of the fifteenth century (Worstbrock, 1989: 651-652). After being moved by Pope Calixtus III's repeated calls for tender of the tithes payment to wage war against the Turkish invaders, Mayr bewailed a number of levies and annates that Germany had to deliver to the Curia. According to Mayr, the payment contributed to the idea that "our once famed nation, which by its own virtue and blood succeeded the Roman empire and was the queen of the world, yet has now been reduced to an impoverished maid and forced to be indebted" (*natio nostra quondam inclita, que sua virtute suoque sanguine Romanum imperium coemit fuitque mundi domina ac regina, nunc ad inopiam redacta ancilla et tributaria facta est*) (Piccolomini, 1962: 10). It is noteworthy that Mayr's complaint proved not to be an isolated phenomenon. It was, rather, symptomatic of a crucial conflict between the Papal Curia and the German church that worsened their relationship in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The dispute is known in Latin among modern medievalists as "*gravamina Germanice nationis*", roughly translated into English as "the tribulations of the German nation" (Tewes, 2005: 209-214).

It is noteworthy that, at first, Piccolomini responded to Mayr's accusation with three friendly letters (Krebs, 2005: 139-141). However, in the winter of 1458, the Sieneese Cardinal decided to reply his colleague in a more elaborate essay, which has subsequently become known to history under the title, *Germania*. In *Germania*, Piccolomini (1962: 46) constructed an embellished image of contemporary Germany in the second half of the fifteenth century in order to refute Mayr's complaints altogether, arguing that "Germany is neither an impecunious nor impotent nation, as you said. Nor is it enslaved." (*neque pauper est Germanica natio neque impotens neque, ut tute ais, ancilla*). The cardinal was of opinion that the Germans

were wealthy, built beautiful towns, traded worldwide, invested in the mining industry, and feasted on tables laid with gold and silver dinnerware. Therefore, they could pay tithes – or so argued Piccolomini – to the papal court. Thus, the text was, by nature, an epistolary treatise employed by Piccolomini to refute Mayr's allegations in favour of the Curia.

Moreover, it is remarkable that, in order to put his argument more effectively, Piccolomini filled his text with flattering words throughout. Witness a passage when the cardinal praised the German landscape:

Faciei autem ornatus quis ignorat longe prestantiorem esse quam olim fuit. Nam agros ubique cultos videmus. Novalia, vineta, viridaria, violaria, pomaria rustica, et suburbana edificia plena deliciis villas amenissimas arces in montibus sitas, oppida muriscincta, splendidissimas urbes quas plerumque maxima preterlabunt flumina aut amnes ambiunt limpidissimi lapideis aut ligneis pontibus permeabiles (Piccolomini, 1962: 49).

That [Germany] today offers a more brilliant, more elegant spectacle than before, who does not know this? We see everywhere cultivated fields and new crops, vineyards, gardens, flowerbeds, orchards in the countryside and in the suburbs, buildings full of treasures, charming country houses, castles on mountains, walled towns, extremely brilliant cities that are often ... cleaned by clear streams that can be crossed on stone or wooden bridges.

Piccolomini subsequently eulogised, not just the German villages and towns, but also the entire people. He exclaimed, “How great is the glory of this people! How great is its brilliance! How great is its splendour!” (*quanta sit huius nationis gloria, qui nitor, qui splendor*) (Piccolomini, 1962: 50). Praiseworthy appellations (*gloria, nitor, splendor*, for instance) brought together here were highly significant in this context. As scholars (Heitmann, 2003: 88-89; Voigt, 1973: 138-140, 147-148) note, any text from the Renaissance period filled up with flattering words, one after another for extolling a specific group of people, can be categorised as “*laudatio nationis*”, a praise for a people. It was a particular literary genre unique to the Renaissance literary culture. Moreover, what is interesting about the style was that no literati in the Renaissance truly believed in such words, for they were understood to be simply a means to an end (Voigt, 1973: 130).

Yet, what really was Piccolomini's purpose in writing *Germania*? Looking at older research papers on this subject, one is confronted with widespread negative assessment of *Germania* regarding the factual insincerity of its representation of Germany due to the rhetorical topos of “*laudatio nationis*” that Piccolomini used in this work. According to Voigt (1973: 138-140), the falsification of the representation and the camouflage caused by the

laudatory speech do not conceal a disparaging impression from the Italian reader. In his studies, Voigt (1973: 133, 147) constantly reminded us of the "trick of *laudatio*" in the interpretation of *Germania*. Due to its abundance of "rhetorical spook", he considered Piccolomini's representation of Germany as "a true work of the art of dissimulation" (Voigt, 1973: 149). Likewise, Rüdiger (1979: 8-19) argued that the flattery in *Germania* and its rhetorical arts belonged to the humanist style of the Renaissance literary culture, and that educated Italian readers could certainly reduce them to the core of the truth. Therefore, we should not take them seriously. Nevertheless, this body of research is problematic. Its judgement is only based on the characteristics of the literary genre of the text. There is no trace of historical comparative investigation into the relationship between the flattering descriptions of Germany in *Germania* and the actual state of Germany in the fifteenth century.

In addition to the Renaissance literary culture, other scholars have reminded us of the fact that Piccolomini composed this epistolary treatise in favour of the Vatican. In this sense, the writing was intended to serve its author's ultimate goal; that is, to show other cardinals – and perhaps the upcoming conclave to be assembled when the aged and ill Pope Calixtus III died – that he was a determined defender of the Roman Curia and its tithes policy towards Germany. In doing so, he ultimately distinguished himself among the candidates for the Chair of St Peter (Widmer, 1960: 92-96; Voigt, 1973: 130; Amelung, 1964: 51-56; Blush, 1983). Thus, it is likely that Piccolomini had political goal in mind when he composed *Germania*. In view of the fact that, after Pope Calixtus III died in 1458, Cardinal Piccolomini was elected to be the former's successor as Pope Pius II in the same year, the argument presented in this body of research needs to be proved against historical evidence; for example, when and how the author published *Germania* and circulated it to his intended audience, or how the text – if it was even published prior to the death of the aged Pope Calixtus III – was received by the members of the conclave. (*Germania* was first published in Strasbourg no earlier than 1515, which was about half a century after its author died (Vollmann, 2008: 12-14).) Yet, the proponents of this argument have completely failed to produce pivotal sources to validate their claims. In fact, it may not be too much of an exaggeration to contend that the argument is essentially mere speculation, although it is based on historical circumstances in the Vatican at the time.

Recently, literary scholars (Heitmann, 2003: 82-95; Vollmann, 2008; Arnold, 2008) have moved away from a focus on deciphering the author's purpose of writing, and, instead, have been paying particular attention to the debate over how far historians are allowed to use

the image of Germany presented in *Germania* as historical evidence in its own right when studying the fifteenth-century German landscape and environments, given that the writer himself had been a papal legate in the 1440s and often travelled in southern and western German regions (Iaria, 2008). Heitmann (2003: 82, 88) argues that, apart from his political goal, Piccolomini “strives for factual information and a comprehensive picture of Germany.” Heitmann adds that “the author obviously seized the opportunity to spread his knowledge of Germany and to open up an area hitherto unrecognized by geography.” Thus, Heitmann (2003: 94-95) postulates that historians should not neglect the historical value of *Germania* only because this epistolary treatise was composed within the genre of “*laudatio nationis*” and fused with the highly politicized intention of the author. However, this body of research does not put forth sufficient effort in examining the accuracy of Piccolomini’s descriptions before deciding whether to give the text due weight as trustworthy historical evidence.

In contrast to those literary scholars, recent historians (Lohrmann & Kühn, 1997; Reinhardt: 2013, 193-199) have started to revisit *Germania* by comparing its depictions with other historical sources to assess its trustworthiness. The work by Lohrmann and Kühn is an exemplary analysis, indeed. It examines the credibility of Piccolomini’s statements about the mining situations in Germany at the end of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. This investigation provides clear proof that an initially apparently untrustworthy eulogy may prove to be historically legitimate on closer examination, as these two historians have shown in their single case study of gold and silver mining in relation to German wealth, as described in *Germania*. It is too naive to repeatedly blame Piccolomini for his insincerity. Rather, it is more illuminating to pay close attention to his choice of words, and compare his descriptions with other reliable sources. Despite limiting the scope to the single study area of mining in Germany, the work of Lohrmann and Kühn significantly revises our current interpretation of *Germania*.

Building on Lohrmann and Kühn’s pathbreaking research, my research paper aims to examine the likelihood that Piccolomini’s eulogies for German landscape as mentioned in *Germania* are historically reliable. The paper asks: What criteria did Piccolomini develop in the presentation of Germany in order to grasp its landscape, people and culture? What was Piccolomini’s aim with his choice of the respective criteria? How did these criteria reflect contemporary notions of an affluent society? Finally, in what way can historians verify “historicity” of Piccolomini’s “*laudatio nationis*”? In other words: was this ultimately a discursive invention of, or discovery of, Germany? To answer these questions, I will firstly

reconstruct and classify the cultural significance of specific criteria Piccolomini used in his flattering depictions of Germany. Thereafter, the image of Germany depicted by him will be historically reviewed to assess its credibility. Finally and most importantly, the connotations behind the respective praise criteria which Piccolomini used to construct the image of opulent Germany shall be discussed.

However, it is to be noted that my paper significantly differs from the precedent research in following respects. As it is widely acknowledged, all historical writings are, by nature, a constructed discourse, not simply a genuine reflection of the past. The contents and meanings of each historical text are constructed by its author's careful choice of words in order to emphasise the meanings of writing as well as render his argument credible. Textual credibility, word choice and the author's purpose of writing are, therefore, inextricably connected. Based on this assumption, I adopt the approach of cultural history in order to better understand the meanings of Piccolomini's word choice in *Germania*, and how far his different criteria of describing Germany reflected the cultural significance of the time.

Apart from close reading of *Germania*, this paper primarily deals with other contemporary sources, most notably correspondence and other writings of Piccolomini, as well as travelogues from late medieval Germany written by other authors. Only through comparison can we assess whether Piccolomini's flattering words in *Germania* can be considered as historical evidence for studying geography, people and culture in late fifteenth-century Germany. My research is, however, limited to exploring three major attributes: urban life, wealth and civilized culture. This scope of research is by no means arbitrary. Rather, it is firmly based on three repeated attributes mentioned by Piccolomini himself and, thus, occupying the greatest part of this epistolary treatise. Moreover, these three attributes have been too often perceived in both older and recent research as mere "rhetorical spook". On the contrary, as it will emerge, my research article argues that the image of Germany as depicted in *Germania* was far from pure rhetorical invention. It neatly corresponded with other contemporary sources. More importantly, in constructing the text, Piccolomini carefully selected only criteria of description which, by contemporary standards, contributed to creating the image of material grandeur of late medieval Germany, a category much valued in the Renaissance culture. It is not for nothing when Piccolomini chose the literary genre of "*laudatio nationis*", filled with descriptions of German material progress, for evidently proving their opulence to them, while the genre still allowed his text to appear in the eyes of his Italian humanist peers as a mere flattery of a culturally inferior people. This epistolary treatise can be used as historical

evidence for further study of urban life, population and its culture as well as historical conception of cultural grandeur in fifteenth-century Germany

“Your country is not impoverished”: German Towns and Their Opulence

In the 1440s, Piccolomini spent much of his time as the papal legate in southern and western Germany. As Esch (2008: 6-68) has recently shown, he would have known the country and been impressed by its opulence. In fact, Piccolomini left us evidence of how much he was amazed by German environments. In a letter to his friend, Cesarini, in 1434, Piccolomini (1909: 34) emphasized that “townspeople’s houses distinguish themselves miraculously, being very refined and delicate, even surpassing those in Florence. All are brightly furbished, with paintings. Each house has a garden, fountain and free space. They honour their dining tables with much silver; the rest of the dining table is splendid, being covered by [tableware] brought from the Italians.” (*Civium edes partibus suis mirifice distincte, polite adeo ac delicate, ne Florentine quidem magis. Candore omnes enitent, picte plerumque, ortos et fontes et areas singule domus habent. ... Honorant mensas multo argento, reliquo mensarum splendore et lota gloria ab Italicis superantur*). Thus, while responding to Mayr’s accusation, Piccolomini could certainly use his wealth of knowledge about Germany to prove that the Germans had no reason to complain about paying tithes to the Papal Curia. His strategy reads as follows:

Quibus ex rebus constat nationem tuam non esse inopem, neque enim pauperes edificare magnifice possunt. Quod si verum est quod aiunt ibi opes esse ubi negociatores, fatearis necesse est opulentissimos esse Germanos, quorum pars maxima lucris inhians, mercaturis intenta alienas longe lateque provincias pervagatur ac, ... non nisi dives domum revertitur. (Piccolomini, 1962: 56)

It is evident that your country is not impoverished, for the poor cannot build magnificence. If it is true, as people say, that wealth exists where merchants are, you must admit that the Germans are the wealthiest. A majority of them yearn for lucrative business and wander through provinces far and wide, ... and never return home without riches.

Piccolomini emphasized three attributes in his rebuttal to Mayr, in which he claimed, “[y]our country is not impoverished.” (*nationem tuam non esse inopem*). The magnificent buildings found in cities throughout Germany, the merchants who lusted after lucrative business, and the wealth of these merchants which were reflected in their affluence at home. What follows is an investigation into these three elements of German landscape, their cultural meanings and historical likelihood.

German Towns and Their Cleanliness

It may not be surprising that Piccolomini dedicated most of his epistolary treatise to the elaborative depiction of German towns, for wealth had been increasingly concentrated in burgeoning urban areas during the closing decades of the Middle Ages (Hirschmann, 2015: 42-48; Schubert, 1998: 108-123). He confronts his readers with a town catalog whose epic volume (73 in number) would certainly impress everyone. Only towns in the southern part of Germany today, Vienna and Bohemia, were described in detail, since the author had personally visited them on his travels through these regions and had seen important towns and their landmarks with his own eyes. In contrast, those towns situated beyond the rivers Rhine and Main were dealt with more generally (cf. Reinhardt, 2013: 193-194; Esch, 2008).

When praising German towns, cleanliness happened to be the most frequently repeated theme in *Germania*. This should be no surprise. As Schubert (2002: 95-96) has remarked, in the Middle Ages, the honour of a town was grounded in purified environments and sound ambience, as well as in magnificent buildings. Take Piccolomini's compliment for Strasbourg's purity as an example:

Argentine vero tantus splendor, tantum decus, ut non ab re id ei nomen inditum fuerit. Que similitudinem Venetiarum exhibet multiplicibus divisa canalibus, que naves in omnes ferme plateas vehunt, eo salubrior atque amenior, quod Venetias salse et grave olentes, Argentinam et dulces et perspicue percurrunt aque (Piccolomini, 1962: 50-51).

Strasbourg, however, is such a brilliant splendor, so great an ornament. ... It is similar to Venice in terms of its myriads of canals, almost all of which boats can perambulate. Yet, these are healthier and more pleasant than those in Venice which taste salty and smell terrible, while only fresh and clear streams run through Strasbourg.

It may be too naive to interpret this to mean that the reason Piccolomini preferred Strasbourg to Venice was simply because of the former's fresh water (*dulces aque*). The greater emphasis lies, rather, on its clear streams (*perspicue aque*) which were "healthier and more pleasant" (*salubrior atque amenior*) than their Venetian counterparts. This suggests that it was urban hygiene that deserved to be singled out for commendation. In fact, Strasbourg primarily owed its cleanliness in the fifteenth century to its famous sewer canal system which had been built in the previous century and was extensively used for waste disposal and city cleaning (Dirlmeier, 1981: 119-125; Boockmann, 1994: 86). This was hardly imaginable in Venice, for it lacked the exhaust duct system, and this lack, in turn, caused Venetian water to "smell

terrible” (*grave olentes*) (cf. Dirlmeier, 1981: 123). It is also important to note that Piccolomini was extremely careful with his choice of example for praising German towns. In this passage, he juxtaposed Strasbourg with Venice, the jewel of Renaissance Italy. Venice derived its wealth from international trade which, in turn, attracted a throng of migrants to this vibrant city (Rothman, 2014). Yet, as a consequence, by the fifteenth century, Venice had witnessed the first stage of its environmental problems: deforestation in the mainland, and water pollution in the lagoon (Appuhn, 2009: 111-158). This would have certainly reduced the city's glory. Thus, it is not for nothing when Piccolomini celebrated “fresh and clear streams” running through Strasbourg in his *Germania*. The description would have imparted an impression to German readers that they were lucky enough to live in such a fine condition, and that their towns could even rival the jewel of the Renaissance.

Water pollution was also the case in Siena, where Piccolomini at one time held the Episcopal See. The greatest architect of the late Middle Ages, Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), reported on the uncleanliness of Siena in his *De re aedificatoria (On Architecture)* written around 1450, as follows:

Senis in ethruria ad lautitiam deest quod desunt cloace. Ex quo fit ut non solum prima ultimaque noctis vigilia quibus horis collectarum sordium vasa ex fenestris funduntur tota feteat: verum et inde interdum obscena et graviter humectata sit (Alberti, 1975: 68r).

Siena, in Tuscany, lacks something that makes it deserve laudation; that is, sewer canals are missing. The result of this is that, not only during the first, but also the final hours of the night, the whole stinky collection of food waste is thrown out of the windows. This sometimes makes it really obscene and grudgingly humect.

According to Alberti, cleanliness was responsible for a town's elegance. It may sound odd or unfamiliar to modern readers, yet, in the process of making a town's fame, sewers played a key role in late medieval architecture. They enhanced public cleanliness, fresh air quality in a town, water source protection, and prevented people from poisoning (Alberti, 1975: 68r). As Kühnel's (1984) comprehensive research shows, there were sewers in many German cities by the end of the fourteenth century, whereas this was not the case in Italy. This technological development in German cities became possible thanks to the advancement and intensity of power centralisation in different cities. The town council, consisting of the town's gentlemen, saw it under their responsibility to introduce and strength law and order in their own town to ensure pleasant living quality of their subjects, not least because their power and legitimacy

were often measured against townspeople's satisfaction concerning how town councils effectively ruled the cities, and how governments' measures contributed to the cities' glory. There is no great stretch to see that controlling a town's contaminated environment and maintaining a town's cleanliness were concrete duties and expectations of most town councils (Engel & Jacob, 2006: 39-89). In this regard, Piccolomini's praise for Strasbourg's clear river streams was more than celebration of German water quality, but perhaps carried with it his appreciation of effective town councils and well-managed environment leading to natural grandeur in Germany.

In addition to urban hygiene, Piccolomini was impressed by the clear rivers in Germany, which hinted at healthy quality of water resources. He recalled in *Germania* that he saw “the most splendid cities which many largest rivers or clearest streams flow along or are about.” (*splendidissimas urbes, quas plerumque maxima preterlabuntur flumina aut amnes ambiunt limpидissimi*) (Piccolomini, 1962: 49). This is by no means a blank laudation functioning within the literary genre of “*laudation nationis*”. One need look no further than a cursory reading of contemporary travelogues to appreciate the superb water quality in fifteenth-century Germany, for they were full of passages about abundant fish population in German rivers. Needless to say, the rich fish stocks naturally testified to excellent water quality. Piccolomini (1909: 33, 426) himself penned a line to his friend Cesarini in 1434, saying that he saw “abundant scores of fish, especially salmon” (*Piscibus habundant multi generis, salmonibus maxime*) in the Rhine, and, in a letter to Campisio written in 1444, he pointed out once again that “there were sweet fishes swimming about in [the Danube] and its branches.” (*Fuerunt ... suavissimi pisces appositi, quos tum Danubius propinquus*). Likewise, the chronicler Wilhelm Rem (1462-1529) (1896: 133) recorded in his *Cronica newer geschichten* (*Chronicle of the New History*) that “in 1521 the moat was excavated from Rottenthor to Luginsland; ... The fishermen had to fish out. Fishes died, which was worth around 400 coins.” (*1521 da ward der statgraben von dem Rottenthor bis gar zu dem Luginsland ausgeschwembt; [...] Die Fischer musten ir fischkesten ausleren; es starben in ob 400 fl. wert eittel forchina*). Comparing Piccolomini's flattering words in *Germania* with other historical sources, I would argue that it is less than sensible to raise a figurative quizzical eyebrow to his sincerity. His extolment was firmly grounded in what he and other contemporaries witnessed and perceived in Germany. His descriptions provide us a vivid glimpse and insight into the natural landscape of late medieval Germany.

Besides natural environments, Piccolomini explicitly celebrated the elegance of the interior parts of German cities, particularly street tidiness (*platearum munditias*). As Dirlmeier (1991: 63) remarks, a plethora of reports from Italian travelers in the late Middle Ages reflect the degree to which they were astounded when their carriages passed by plastered streets in German towns. Piccolomini was once again not alone in his observations. Take his description of Bavarian towns as an example:

Noricorum oppidum ... Quis intus nitor platearum, que domorum munditie! ... Habent Suevi trans Danubium multas urbes, regina tamen omnium Hulma est, et ipsa potens et non immunda civitas. Baioarii ... non pauca oppida, in quis multe munditie, multus nitor (Piccolomini, 1962: 55-56).

The City of Nuremberg ... Upon entering [it], the splendour of the streets, and the tidiness of the buildings! ... The Swabian have many towns across the Danube. Of all towns, Ulm is the queen. It is a powerful yet not unclean community. The Bavarian [have] no few towns, among which many are clean; many are graceful.

That Piccolomini celebrated “the splendor of the streets” (*nitor platearum*) is not arbitrary. His choice of this criteria for praising German towns was firmly grounded in historical conception of town's glory. In the late Middle Ages, the paving was considered not least as a luxurious ornament of a town (Schubert, 2002: 106-107), for only rich cities could afford pavement, an advanced technology in the late Middle Ages (Engel & Jacob, 2006: 76-77). Had Piccolomini written *Germania* at the time of Emperor Charles IV (1346-1378) and gone into raptures about the streets in Nuremberg, Ulm and the like with the term “the splendour of the streets”, his contemporaries, such as Johann von Neumarkt, the chancellor of Emperor Charles IV, would certainly have objected. This is because Johann had been complaining about the streets in Nuremberg, saying that they turned into swamps during the rainfall, so that the passers-by, the knights in particular, moved forward only with considerable effort (Kühnel, 1984: 60). In his complaint, the expression “*nitor platearum*” was completely unsuitable for Nuremberg. Yet, a good 100 years later, some cities such as Nuremberg and Ulm, owed their splendor to pavement, the construction of which was set in motion in the late fourteenth century, and which had become common in most German towns by the beginning of the fifteenth century (Dirlmeier, 1981: 143). Perhaps, Italian literati may have laughed at a series of flowery words in the above passage concerning tidy streets in German cities if they recalled the genre of *Germania*. Yet, German readers would certainly have smiled at the glory of their cities, and would have felt it difficult to reject Piccolomini's claim that their nation had been plundered

by the Roman Curia, and thus reduced to poverty and slavery. After all, a poor people could not build beautiful towns.

However, it is noteworthy that cleanliness was not the norm everywhere. Schubert's research (2002: 95-107) on the environmental history of medieval Germany confirms that filth was found here and there in most cities, although town councils had started to take on specific tasks as a result of the political development in centralising power pursued by town elites since the beginning of the fifteenth century. If medieval city streets were covered with dirt, dust and disease, this should alert us to a question of why Piccolomini still praised German cities for their cleanliness. It is important to remember, I contend, that the medieval city was hierarchically structured, whereby the inner town area, which was reserved for the patriciate as a favourable residential zone, often was the first to be paved, and thus, was noticeably cleaner and tidier. There were also more waste disposal facilities there than in other parts of town.(Engel & Jacob, 2006: 76-105; Hauser, 1987: 155; see also Brown and Small, 2007: 165-167, 172-173). Thus noted Endres Tucher (1423-1507), Nuremberg's master builder, in the late fifteenth century:

Mer desgleichen sol der stat paumeister geflissen sein, das er zu weiennachten, ... zu ostern, ... oder wo vill herschaft herkomen sollt oder sust im jare, wenn sein als gar not wer, von der apotheken pei den predigern und also fur das rathaus piß fur den schön prunnen, ... und hinter dem rathaus und sust nirgen weitter, das pflaster lassen raumen ... und dasselb kot und mist dann auß füren lassen (Tucher, 1862: 254).

Similarly, the town master builders should be attentive that at Christmas, ... at Easter, at Pentecost ..., or when many nobles come here, or else in the year, if very necessary, the pavement is neatly swept, and manure and litter must be transported and cleared away from the pharmacy at the preachers to the town hall and the graceful fountain, even at the troughs in front of the candelabrum and behind the town hall, but nowhere else.

Tucher clearly specified that the inner part of a town, here indicated by "the town hall" (*das rathaus*) and "the beautiful prunnen" (*den schön prunnen*), was cleaned even more thoroughly on religious holidays and, above all, during the visit of "nobles" (*herschaft*). Yet, only this part of town was specially cleaned up, "but nowhere else" (*und sust nirgen weitter*). If Piccolomini as a papal legate can be counted to a member of nobility, it may be possible that his stay was mostly limited to the clean town center. One might say with all due caution that, when writing

Germania, Piccolomini had in mind this clean privileged part of town when he saluted the tidiness of German cities in general.

Therefore, it is not mere calculated flattery or even omission of uncomfortable facts when Piccolomini (1962: 56) admitted that “one must concede that there is no people in Europe whose cities are tidier than those of the Germans.” (*fatebitur nullam esse in Europa nationem, cuius urbes mundiores ... quam in Germania sint*). If we take into consideration the living conditions in late medieval German towns, especially their street cleaning and the strict hierarchy of housing, we cannot simply condemn Piccolomini's honeyed words to a "rhetorical spook". It is too naive to deny the trustworthiness of the text right beforehand, and this is also the case when we turn to “*templorum magnificentia et privatis ac publicis edificis exornata*”, the magnificence of buildings which were ornamented with both private and public houses.

Elegant Buildings in German Towns

In addition to cleanliness, magnificent buildings in German towns formed a subject of extolment in *Germania*. Public and private houses stood in the foreground for commendation, just as the praise of Salzburg shows: “In Salzburg, ... nothing is missing that is essential to the magnificence of the town, when you look at public or private edifices.” (*Salzburge ... nihil est, quod ad splendidissime civitatis magnificentiam desideres, sive publica spectes sive privata opera*) (Piccolomini, 1962: 52). This suggests that, like his other contemporaries, Piccolomini was of opinion that a town primarily owed its grandeur (*magnificentiam*) to architecture.

It is remarkable that Piccolomini (1962: 50) clearly divided magnificent buildings into two categories, both of which played a key role in embellishing a town. These two were spiritual and worldly houses. However, the former was preferably enhanced. In *Germania*, cathedrals (in Aachen, Speyer, Vienna and Bamberg), monasteries (St. Emeram in Regensburg) and parish churches (St. Sebaldus and St. Lorenz in Nuremberg) were explicitly panegyricized. As Voigt's study (1973: 138) showed, Piccolomini offered his readers descriptions about interior decoration, church treasury, well-known relics and tombs, and locally revered saints or the wealth of the clergy. Older research (Amelung, 1964; Voigt, 1979; Rüdiger, 1979) had suggested that Piccolomini's impressive catalogue of graceful ecclesiastical buildings in various German towns served, in the first place, as his argumentation strategy directed against Mayr and his popular depletion thesis. However, if this body of research is correct, one still need to clarify why Piccolomini devoted a number of pages to documenting relics, tombs and saints in certain cities, which was not directly relevant to his argument that Germany was not

impoverished. In this respect, the factual information he cited in *Germania* cannot be explained by the requirements of the alleged purpose of writing alone. It may also be possible that Piccolomini grasped the opportunity to highlight his knowledge about Germany, which even Pope Calixtus III recognized. Indeed, Piccolomini (1984: 93-94) proudly recorded in his autobiography that Pope Calixtus III once publicly said, “Enea has always been an eulogist and defender of the Germans ... and Calixtus listened to him more than any other cardinals when it came to the affairs about Germany.” (*Eneas Germanorum semper et laudator et defensor extitit ... et Calistus eum preceteris cardinalibus in rebus Germanicis audivit*). This is rather suggestive, for it proves that Piccolomini did not simply show his admiration for German spiritual architecture because of a cynical strategy. Detailed information in his descriptions of Germany was perhaps far more straightforward than older generation of historians were apt to admit.

While the depiction of the magnificent German churches was primarily a reflection of his brilliant knowledge of Germany, Piccolomini also squarely mentioned the worldly splendid buildings in the cities as evidence of the wealth of the Germans. In this respect, his praise of stone construction in German cities was of great significance. Take the description of Frankfurt as an example:

In Franconia ... iacet Francfordia, inter inferiores et superiores Theutones commune emporium et urbs, quamvis magna ex parte lignea, pluribus tamen palatiis ornata lapideis, in quis vel reges haud indigne recipiantur. Templata vero deo sacra ex secto lapide superbissima visuntur, et pons saxeus mire longitudinis partem urbis transmuganam minorem maiori coniungit (Piccolomini, 1962: 55).

In Franconia ... Frankfurt is a town and community market fair for lesser and greater Germans. Although a large part of the town is decorated with wood, many mansions are ornamented with stone, in which gentlemen would not be received without dignity. Graceful houses of the Holy God seem to be made of stone, and a stone bridge miraculously unites the greater part of the town which is residential area with the smaller one.

It is important to note that in the Middle Ages, the most common building material was still wood. As Schubert (1998: 101) remarked, if a house was stonewalled, it was designated as “stone house”, which could create a great reputation for its owner because only the rich could afford such a residence. In this context, a series of stone buildings mentioned in the description of Frankfurt serves as an expression of the wealth of the city. This connotation was anticipated in the first sentence: “Frankfurt is a town and *community market fair* for lesser and

greater Germans (my emphasis).” The message is relatively clear. The Frankfurt merchants distinguished their city by embellishing it with the most luxurious and fashionable material of the time. Here, Piccolomini not simply described Frankfurt as an opulent city which had payment capacity for religious tithes, but rather a vibrant and bourgeoning city ready to adopt new trends in an age of affluence. In this sense, his *Germania* was more than a record of historical past. His choice of descriptive criteria concerning German wealth offers us a direct glimpse into a thought world of fifteenth-century German townspeople, which is otherwise difficult to find in other surviving sources.

Moreover, the late Middle Ages witnessed the permanent transition to stone construction. Once again, Piccolomini did not hesitate to capture the trend and singled it out for commendation in *Germania*. The reason for this change in mode of housing construction was a number of town-wide conflagrations in many regions, and town councils agreeing that, for safety reasons, new buildings had to be built only from stone to prevent towns from fires (Kühnel, 1984: 47). Felix Faber, for instance, recorded that after the great fire in Bolzano in northern Italy in 1483, the townspeople turned to a more costly construction methods than before for the sake of fire protection (Kühnel, 1984: 52). These stone buildings were often considered by contemporaries as "pulchritudinous" (*schön*) (Engel & Jacob, 2006: 89-90). The German Johannes Antonius Campanus (1429-1477) (1707: 357) noted in the late fifteenth century, when he witnessed the famous timber framing houses (*Fachwerkhäuser*) in southwestern Germany, that “[in Regensburg] the exterior of a building is decorated more showily than the interior. It is bedecked with timber framing for keeping cold weather away, [and] for the sake of pulchritude.” (*Edificia foris ornatiora quam intus. Tabulatis magna pars tegitur: et ad excludendam hyemem: et ad pulchritudinem.*). A similar judgement is neatly echoed in Piccolomini's description of Speyer, when he mentioned how townspeople reconstructed their town after a conflagration in 1450:

Nec Spiram quisquam contempserit populo plenam et magnificis edibus ornatam. Cuius nobile templum, quamvis anno jubilei conflagraverit, ita tamen postea restauratum est, ut felix incendium illud fuisse videatur (Piccolomini, 1962: 50).

No one would condemn Speyer, a city full of people and ornamented with magnificent buildings. Although its noble church had gone up in flames in the jubilee year, it was restored afterwards. Thus, that great fire seems to be only good fortune.

That Piccolomini considered such a "great fire" (*incendium*) as "fortunate" (*felix*) may seem puzzling for today readers, yet, this was by no means a "rhetorical spook". Rather, Piccolomini's judgement carried with it a very contemporary consciousness that stone buildings were most favourable. In this regard, Piccolomini would have been cordially congratulating the architectural achievement of the townspeople of Speyer, which also concretely proved that the Germans were materially developed and, therefore, not impoverished, as the discourse "*gravamina Germanice nationis*" postulated. Furthermore, it is here once again that Piccolomini's choice of a flattering category was firmly grounded in contemporary taste of material culture. However, it is not my argument to make a naive interpretation that historians can rely on Piccolomini's description of Germany just because of its similarity to other historical evidence. Instead, Piccolomini's *Germania* proved to be a trustworthy source not least because it brought together different elements indispensable for celebrating a town's glory in Renaissance culture. Important was, rather, not merely the description of bricks and stones that walled up German gentlemen's houses, but also the Germans' enthusiasm for enriching their towns according to contemporary tastes and trends in urban culture. Indeed, it is Piccolomini's constructed discourse of praising a nation that makes *Germania* a valuable source.

Furthermore, it is also useful to emphasize that a comparison of town houses with princely palaces or gentlemanly mansions in order to highlight the opulence of the German nation was one of the most common topoi deployed by Piccolomini in his *Germania*. For example, Piccolomini (1962: 51) contended that in Strasbourg, "there are also splendid sanctuaries of the saints and monasteries of the monks [built] with grandeur and adornment; an outstanding town hall, gentlemen's and priests' houses. The princes would regret not [having a chance] to live in." (*Sunt et alia sanctorum delubra et monachorum cenobia et amplitudine et ornatu splendidissima, pretorium excellens et civium et sacerdotum edes, quas nec reges incoluisse piguerit*). Like Strasbourg, Viennese architecture was explicitly respected in *Germania* (Piccolomini, 1962: 53): "We will not speak of the splendour and amplitude of private houses, of which you may find not a few [equal] to the High Royal Excellency." (*Tacemus privatarum edium splendorem et amplitudinem, quarum non paucas invenias ad regiam excellentiam fastigiatas*). However, no description could rival that of Nuremberg which was demonstrably graphic:

Noricorum oppidum, ... preterire non possumus. Dic, rogamus, ... Quot ibi civium edes invenias regibus dignas! Cuperent tam egregie Scotorum reges quam mediocres Norimberge cives habitare! (Piccolomini, 1962: 55-56).

The city of Nuremberg, ... cannot be allowed to pass unmentioned. Tell me, pray, how many buildings you can find there that are worthy of royal dignity! The kings of Scots would wish to live in such graceful [houses] as those of ordinary citizens in Nuremberg!

Once again, one might argue that this compliment was simply a rhetoric within the literary genre of “*laudatio nationis*”. Indeed, Voigt (1973: 139) contended that Piccolomini’s Italian readers, who were well versed in the humanistic style of literature could only amuse themselves with this literary “trick”, and may also have grieved over the poor Scottish kings who lived so minimally. As a consequence, no literati – then as now – would seriously appreciate the author’s words. In a sense, such an argument implies that Piccolomini’s extolment contained no factual quality that it was made up out of thin air. Yet, was it simply so?

Putting aside the features of laudatory genre, I propose that we need to examine Piccolomini’s descriptions in the light of other historical sources to ascertain the accuracy of the factual information as well as to gauge the significance of passages in *Germania*. Take Nuremberg as an example. The city itself was perhaps the most thriving one in medieval Germany. The famous chronicler Hartmann Schedel (1440-1514) (1493: fol. 100v) claimed that “Nuremberg is reputable in the whole Germany, and a widely visited city among foreigners.” (*Nurnberg ist in ganzem teuchen land und auch bey etlichen völkern ein fastnamhaftige und weyt besuchte stat*). Other authors, whose depictions were written without any political agenda, expressed themselves in much the same way as Piccolomini. The German humanist Johannes Cochlaeus, for example, praised Nuremberg for its beautiful stone houses in his *Brevis Germanie Descriptio* (2010: 52):

Edificiis excellentissima. Edificia eorum quam maxime sunt egregia tam publica quam privata firmitate, commoditate simul et amenitate partim beneficio nature, partim vero civium solercia. Habent enim proxime urbem lapidis harenosi fodinam, ... Proinde pulcerrimos educunt parietes quadrati lapidis, qui facile quoque renovari potest in externa crusta, ubi vetustate deformior apparuerit.

Most outstanding architecture. Their public and private buildings are of great sturdiness and comfort, as well as with amenity, partly benefiting from the pleasant location, partly from the talents of townspeople. Next to the city they have a sandstone mine, ... Thus, they have built the most beautiful quadrangular city wall from stone which can also be easily renovated for its external surface when it happens to be deformed by time.

Similarly, the German Johannes Antonius Campanus (1707: 392) was so deeply moved by the gorgeous view of Nuremberg that he reckoned the city “the most opulent and beautiful town in whole Germany.” (*urbem Germaniae totius opulentissimam et pulcherrimam*). Not least, as Heitmann (2003: 122-125) suggests in his impressive study on Italian perceptions of Germany in the early modern period, Nuremberg was often perceived in Italian travel reports as being the German Venice. Thus, Piccolomini's depictions were not unique in terms of flattering this particular city.

Now, let us come back to Piccolomini's description of Nuremberg. Witness the above quotation, again. It may not be too difficult by now to understand that Piccolomini intentionally singled out Nuremberg for laudation, for in contemporary imagination it was the most prosperous town in Germany and its affluence could rival that of Venice. Once again, Piccolomini's praise for Nuremberg perfectly suited his literary strategy. On the one hand, its enthusiastic encomium buttressed his argument of wealthy Germany, which no German literati would be willing to deny. On the other hand, its overtly joyful exclamations may have brought his Italian humanist fellows to laughter due to the literary tricks he deployed to disguise his argument, while they would not have seriously believed that the writer faithfully praised that particular nation. Not least, the case of Nuremberg is interesting because it demonstrates how Piccolomini effectively applied the literary genre of “*laudatio nationis*” to serve his specific purposes. The genre did not hinder a poet to offer sincere accounts capturing contemporary consciousness and factual information, as modern scholars have claimed, given that the poet had sufficient literary talent.

Merchants, Natural Resources and German Wealth

Piccolomini mentioned not only the magnificent buildings as evidence of the wealth of the Germans, but also the fact that, according to him, Germany also owed its wealth to merchants and traders:

Quod si verum est quod aiunt ibi opes esse ubi negociatores, fatearis necesse est opulentissimos esse Germanos, quorum pars maxima lucris inhians, mercaturis intenta alias longe lateque provincias pervagatur ac, ... non nisi dives domum revertitur (Piccolomini, 1962: 56).

If it is true, as people say, that wealth exists where merchants are, you must admit that the Germans are the wealthiest. A majority of them yearn for lucrative business, and wander through provinces, far and wide, ... and never return home without riches.

It should be noted that Piccolomini likely had two purposes with this statement. On the one hand, with regard to his audience in Germany, Piccolomini highlighted the idea that the wealth of the Germans was a result of the spirit of hard work by German merchants. On the other hand, he seems to want to convince his audience in the Vatican – that is, the Cardinal College – that he had the correct ecclesiastical attitude towards merchants, which he demonstrated by criticising their notorious greed (“a majority of them yearn for lucrative business”; *quorum pars maxima lucris inhians*). As the medievalist Le Goff (1989: 68-73; see also Grabmayer, 2004: 27) points out, the medieval church held that merchants shamelessly lacked moral controls when it came to profit maximization. Despite the double entendre of his expressions about the German merchants, one can agree that Piccolomini unmistakably identified the wealth of Germany with them. In this regard, we need to explore the state of affluence in late medieval Germany, especially among the German traders, to assess the historical validity of his flowery words.

In order to prove the material prosperity of the Germans even more clearly, Piccolomini shed light onto the splendour in the houses of German tradesmen. In *Germania*, the cardinal astonished his readers, saying that the dining tables he saw in respectable agents' houses were overloaded with gold and silver. Piccolomini (1962: 57) asked his German opponents: “Are there any houses in your country where one would not drink from silver [glasses]?” (*Nam quod diversorium apud vos est in quo non ex argento bibitur?*). This passage has been often condemned as a “rhetorical spook” in the older research on account of its lack of a tangible quantity (see, for example, Voigt: 1973: 140). In fact, Piccolomini's judgement was not made out of thin air, for it contained a fragment of memory from his travels through Germany. That the dining tables at German merchants' houses were fully equipped with gold and silver utensils, as well as overladen with extravagant meal, can be proved not least by contemporary sources. It was attested in the wills of German merchants when they

bequeathed their relatives the most valuable items from their household contents. Witness the will of a certain gentleman, Friedrich Wigger, from fifteenth-century Bremen:

Dazu gab er Godike [Wigger, seinem Bruder] und seinen Kindern die vier silbernen Schalen, die er zu Köln hatte anfertigen lassen, ferner seine große Wärmepfanne, zwei größten Grapen [Gefäß mit drei Beinen], seine bemalten Platten und seine großen Klapptische ... Weiter gab er Ghezen, seiner Schwester, eine silberne Schale und zwei silberne Löffel, ... Ferner gab er Metten und Ghezen, den Töchtern seines Bruders, je eine seiner kleinen silbernen Schalen und einen silbernen Löffel ... Weiter gab er Ghezen von Köln, der Schwester seiner Ehefrau, und Frau Beken, der Tochter ihrer Schwester, ... jeder einen silbernen Löffel. (quoted in Engel and Jacob, 2006: 233-234)

He gave Godike [Wigger, his brother] and his children the four silver bowls that he had had made at Cologne, as well as his large hot pan, two largest tripod skillets, his painted plates and his large folding tables. Next he gave to Ghezen, his sister, a silver bowl and two silver spoons ... He also gave each of his little silver bowls and a silver spoon to Metten and Ghezen, his brother's daughters ... Next he gave Ghezen of Cologne, his wife's sister, and Mrs. Beken, her sister's daughter, ... each a silver spoon.

Such valuable items can also be found in other German merchant families, as endlessly recorded in their wills (Engel & Jacob, 2006: 232-234). Again, their mentions in *Germania* were more a true reflection of the Germans' wealth than a mere a blank "rhetorical spook".

The precious household items apart, Piccolomini extensively mentioned gold and silver mining as proof of the Germans' riches. According to him, "veins of gold and silver" (*venas auri atque argenti*) were found in Germany (Piccolomini, 1962: 57):

In Bohemia montes Cuthni, ... inexhaustas ostenderunt argenti mineras. ... et in Bohemia fluvii sunt, in quis ad magnitudinem ciceris aurea grana ... reperiunt. Ferrum et auricalcum et eris magnam vim domi reperitis. In Hungaria quoque aurum, quod apud Cremitiam reperitur. (Piccolomini, 1962: 57)

In Bohemia, mountains in Kutná Hora prove to be inexhaustible gold mines. ... and there are rivers in Bohemia in which plethora of gold seeds have been discovered. And you will find at home a large amount of iron and copper. In Hungary, gold is also found near Kremnitz.

Here, Piccolomini listed mining regions in Bohemia and Hungary, which, politically, were parts of the Holy Roman Empire or Germany in the fifteenth century. Moreover, as Piccolomini

(1962: 53) commented, “although Bohemia speaks the Slavic language, it is under the German Empire and is accustomed to German culture.” (*Bohemia, quamvis Sclavonico sermone utitur, sub imperio tamen Germanico sese continet et moribus utitur Theutonicis*). It is also important to note that, although silver mining in Germany in the fifteenth century went into a deep crisis (Lohrmann & Kühn, 1997: 387-389), the fact that there was no devaluation of these mining regions provides proof of the German wealth. This is because, in the above-mentioned passage, Piccolomini's viewpoint primarily pointed to the long-term potential profits of silver and gold mines; that is, their incredible value as economic reserves. They were not mentioned in *Germania* simply due to the short-term profit they provided.

As far as gold was concerned, Piccolomini resorted to Hungarian gold resources in support of his thesis regarding the wealth of the Germans. His tone in the following passage was highly significant:

In Hungaria quoque aurum, quod apud Cremitiam reperitur, ipsi plerumque contrectatis magnasque domum refertis opes, quod supellectiles vestre demonstrant et onuste auro argentoque mense. (Piccolomini, 1962: 57)

In Hungary, there are also gold mines near Kremnitz. You usually ravish them and bring a great deal of wealth back home which can be seen from your household items and dining tables loaded with gold and silver.

According to Piccolomini, the Germans derived their wealth mainly from the fact that they “usually ravish [gold in Hungary] and bring a great deal of wealth back home.” Unmistakably, this was written in a reproachful tone; it was by no means a flattery. Rather, Piccolomini's criticism of the Germans was firmly grounded in the economic relationship between Germany and Hungary in the fifteenth century. In fact, as Gecsényi (2001, 122-124) has shown, by the late Middle Ages Hungarian gold had become a preferred method of payment in the cloth and textile industry trade between Hungary and the southern German cities, particularly Nuremberg. More than 80% of European gold output came from Hungary in the fourteenth century, and the circulation of Hungarian gold coins became common in western Europe in the fifteenth century (Gedai, 2001: 120). Thus, it was not an exaggeration when Piccolomini claimed that the Hungarian gold was hauled away by the Germans. Not least, it is also important to remember that at the time he was writing *Germania*, Piccolomini had already had a career as a royal diplomat and papal legate. He would have been well acquainted with the German-Hungarian relationship due to his many years of activity and travel in the region, and thus expressed himself in this passage as a country expert.

Furthermore, Piccolomini deployed the discourse "Gold from Hungary" as an opportunity to reflect on the role of gold in the relationship between countries:

Nullam invenies gentem, que sua e regione facile asportari aurum sinat, communis est hic morbus, et in omnes eque provincias effusus. Nam quemadmodum Germani ob hanc causam Italos insectantur odio, ita et Hungari Germanos. Nam quid est, quod Pannonice plebes egrius ferant quam suo in regno Almanos negociari, a quibus omne egeritur regionis aurum? (Piccolomini, 1962: 44)

You will find no country that would allow their gold to be abducted easily from their own region. It is a common illness, which is dispersed in all provinces alike. Just as the Italians are hated by the Germans for this reason, so are the Germans by the Hungarians. Well, what will happen when all golds of this region have been depleted because the people of Pannonia unfavourably transferred it to the kingdom of Germany rather than trading in their own region?

Piccolomini brought to light in this passage the outrage of people concerned with how their wealth, and gold in particular, was being taken from them. He saw such resentment as "a common illness" (*communis morbus*) which was "dispersed in all provinces alike" (*in omnes eque provincias effusus*). With this judgement, Piccolomini clearly aimed to address a fundamental criticism of the Germans regarding their "*gravamina nationis*". After all, the entire grievance focused on one point, namely on "money from Germany" (*argentum ex Germania*) which was taken away by the Papal Curia. In this respect, Piccolomini would have criticised the greedy Germans, who did not want to pay the curate the annates. By regarding greed for money as "illness", Piccolomini subsequently introduced a virtue as the antidote, clearly expressed in the imperative formulation: "To face avarice with generosity" (*opponite, liberalitatem avaritie*) (Piccolomini, 1962: 69). Undoubtedly, in Piccolomini's point of view, the Germans needed to direct their "generosity" to the Papal Curia, which proved to be the ultimate purpose of his entire account of the German wealth in *Germania*.

Conclusion

To refute the depletion thesis put forward by Martin Mayr in the *gravamina Germanicae nationis*, Piccolomini developed a brilliant, flattering image of Germany. Three traits were of great importance to represent the civilized wealth of the Germans: graceful cities with notable cleanliness, magnificent buildings, and a large number of merchants as well as inexhaustible natural resources. As I have shown, these three categories reflected not just the factual information of fifteenth-century Germany, but also the contemporary consciousness

and perception of what made the material glory of a nation. This tripartite image contributed to Piccolomini's construction of Germany as a nation of natural and material grandeur. Ultimately, his depictions served to render *Germania* a constructed discourse functioning as a reminder of the German capacity for paying the annates to the Papal Curia.

Although the characteristics chosen by Piccolomini for depicting Germany so favourably might have been subject to his political goal, his image of Germany proved, I contend, to be more than a mere flattery. Rather, his "*laudatio nationis*" was based on his own experiences, gained during his travels through Germany, and as testified in his own correspondence from the journeys. Moreover, as I have demonstrated throughout this essay, when we examine Piccolomini's praise of Germany historically, it becomes evident that his image of Germany neatly corresponded to other contemporary records, ranging from the town tidiness and magnificent town buildings to lavish dining table decorations. In this context, Piccolomini's image of Germany can be seen as a revelation of the identity of a country and its people. It carried with it not only a true description of German landscape and population, but also certain attitudes and cultural values of the time attached to each category he deployed in his depictions of Germany.

Unlike other scholars, I have argued throughout this essay that the genre "*laudatio nationis*" by no means hindered the writer to convey his faithful celebration of German wealth. Instead, a learned poet, like Piccolomini, could play with and command the genre to serve his purposes. No German literati would be able to deny what Piccolomini composed about German opulence, for it was firmly grounded in empirical evidence and contemporary imagination when ones came to think of fifteenth-century Germany. As such, the Germans' ability to pay tithes to the Papal Curia seemed to be evidently proved in *Germania*. Yet, Piccolomini's overtly exciting tone in applauding the Germans' wealth may have brought his Italian peers to laughter due to the literary tricks he deployed to conceal his intended argument. They would not have seriously believed that Piccolomini cordially respected Germany, a nation which they considered as culturally inferior. As such, Piccolomini could maintain his image as a defender of the Papal Curia who resolutely pursued the payment policy towards Germany, while appearing at the same time as a sincere friend praising Germany to his colleague, Martin Mayr. Examining *Germania* as a constructed discourse, framed by both historical factual information and contemporary consciousness of cultural values, helps us better understand how Piccolomini brilliantly applied the literary genre of "*laudatio nationis*"

to serve his specific purposes. After all, historians should not ignore the fact that the Cardinal was a Poet Laureate. And, *Germania* is an epitome of his gorgeous literary talent.

Certainly, my study of *Germania* is by no means an exhaustive analysis of *all* descriptive criteria deployed by Piccolomini. As I pointed out earlier, my investigation is limited to only the most repeated themes; those that seem to be of great import for the author's main argument. There are, to my observation, other criteria that were mentioned in the text: popular religiosity, the humanist studies (*studia humanitatis*) movement, hospitality and interactions with people, and military prowess of the Germans. Further attempts to decode and prove the author's intentions, as well as research aimed at testing the text's historical reliability, should prove valuable. However, this research paper has shown that in the case of fifteenth-century German natural landscape, elegant towns, and opulent mercenary lifestyle – all these elements in *Germania* were grounded in historical facts and reasonable probability. To reduce *Germania* to a blank laudatory work, as has often been done in traditional research, is to neglect a sheer number of first-hand records carefully put together by a contemporary expert in German affairs. Enea Silvio Piccolomini's *Germania* is a far more straightforward praise of a country and far less “rhetorical spook” than scholars have been wont to assume. Indeed, it proves to be a trustworthy source, accurately capturing the state of Germany and its people, as well as contemporary consciousness, tastes and living trends at the dawn of the Renaissance.

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