
This well-documented monograph in Italian is about the philosopher John Selden, one of the most important Common Lawyers of the seventeenth century. Professor Caruso seeks to understand the true historical context of Selden’s political ideas behind the image of him as a sort of «English Confucius who said everything and the contrary of everything» (Vol. 1, p. 37).

Bearing this in mind, the first volume is concerned with understanding the biography of Selden in relation to the major English political events between the Elizabethan period and the Protectorate of Cromwell. Selden is seen, more so than Coke, as the most coherent defender of the freedoms embodied in common law against all the threats of tyranny.

The second volume examines mainly the juridico-political features of the most important of Selden’s works: *Titles of Honour* (1614, 1631), *De deis Syris* (1617), *The Histories of Tythes* (1617), *Mare Clausum* (1635), *De jure naturali et gentium juxta disciplinam Hebraeorum* (1640) and of course *Table Talk* (1689). Caruso argues for a partial revision of Richard Tuck’s view that Selden was in many ways the closest English equivalent to Grotius and represented in English politics a modified and more acceptable version of what Hobbes also stood for, i.e. anticlericalism and religious toleration. He favours a more complex and less homogeneous view of Selden as the creator of a theoretical ‘bricolage’ that put together custom and reason, usages and natural rights in order to defend the traditional freedoms embodied in the common law against the threat of political absolutism and religious fanaticism.

Caruso is also concerned with explaining, at the end of the second volume, the influence of Selden, again mostly seen as the forerunner of a ‘conservative’ notion of freedom, on other thinkers of the seventeenth century and later, such as Hobbes, Matthew Hale, Harrington, Richard Cumberland, Robert Filmer, John Locke, Algernon Sidney, Samuel Pufendorf, Leibniz, Giambattista Vico, Edmund Burke, et al.

Caruso’s wide-ranging and informed account of the influence and historical importance of Selden will be valuable to all those interested in the history of political thought.

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